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The Contemporary Theatre, 1924

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By James Agate

With an Introduction by
Noël Coward

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TO

LEONARD REES

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Introduction

I AM very appreciative of the honour Mr. James Agate has done me in asking me to write an introduction to this volume of the Contemporary Theatre, mainly because he is one of the few critics in England who make a genuine effort to be constructive.

The mental equipment of the average critic consists of an enthusiastic knowledge of Fleet Street, and a faint contempt for the commercial theatre (fostered, doubtless, by the mildly bitter realisation that plays, though easily written, are not so easily accepted), and a facility for presenting whatever opinions they may have in uninspired, but adequate journalese.

Mr. Agate, by force of his nimble mind and definite love of the stage, rises like a Triton among minnows, though even he cannot entirely be absolved of certain prejudices, the greatest of which is his unbridled passion for dead dramatists and deader plays. Maugham, Shaw, Galsworthy, Barrie, and all contemporary writers shrivel into insignificance before the ardent flame of his devotion to the Restoration playwrights. He rushes into the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, with all the force of his dynamic intelligence concentrated upon enjoying himself, and finally emerges proudly flushed and inebriated with the

pirouettings and gambollings of his own pet Restoration lambs. His enthusiasm even carries him so far as to say in his criticism of *The Way of the World* that "wit of Millamant's order is imperishable for the simple reason that her creator gave her a mind," and "there are more Millimants about town to-day than there are Hedda Gablers"; but later on, in another outburst of exuberant enjoyment of *The Country Wife*, he has apparently already sacrificed his passion for Millamant on the altar of his adoration for Wycherley's *Mrs. Pinchwife*, when he says: "Strip Millamant of her satins and laces and she ceases to exist; reduce Mrs. Pinchwife to her native woollens and she is unchanged."

Surely the dust of ages cannot, for Mr. Agate, so have enshrouded in glamour these excellent relics that he fails to observe the infinite superiority of Mr. Somerset Maugham's polished *finesse*. I have a sneaking suspicion that had the Duchess and Pearl Grayston been christened respectively "Lady Lovesick" and "Mistress Faithless," he would have appreciated them more.

But in spite of the fact that he occasionally drags the Restoration herring across the path of unbiased criticism, the truth remains that his selective mind and extraordinary subtlety of perception are of immeasurable service to the English theatre.

There is practically no other critic of the present day who so successfully eliminates the personal element in his tirades against wretched actors, authors and

producers. Mr. Agate possesses the full courage of his convictions and doesn't wait to see which way the wind is blowing before voicing them, nor does he ever assume that patriarchal air of condescension and patronage which sits so heavily upon his younger associates. It is also a great comfort when reading his current notice in *The Sunday Times* not to stumble across such phrases as "Methinks there will be no grounds for divorcing this right merry little comedy from the English stage for many a long day," or agonising witticisms of a like nature.

Unfortunately, even Mr. Agate falls for the prevailing mania for comparison. He seems unable to write a notice of one author without mentioning at least sixty-five others in various stages of mental or physical decomposition. It is a little disheartening for an ambitious playwright, waiting anxiously for either praise or blame, to be greeted with the following sort of notice :

"ROLLING STONES," by Lucy Minaver.

Miss Minaver's play has one great thing in its favour—it presents its problem honestly. What matter that the self-same problem has been handled by Stephen Bloodworthy in *Fate Enchained*—that memorable scene when Tessie, soaked in absinthe, rounds on her embittered Auntie Jessie, crying : "Don't touch me, don't touch me ; it is your upbringing that has brought me down," or yet again that scene of exquisite pathos in De Vriaac's *La Vâche Espagnole*, when Juanita returns from the bull fight to find her lover, crazed with wine, tearing up all the photographs of her mother's wedding group. She goes up to him tenderly : "Pourquoi fais-tu ça dans la cuisine, mon chéri ?" she asks. Then the almost stark realism of his reply : "Parcequ'il fait moins chaud ici que dans la salle-à-manger !"

There is always a certain defiance in De Vriaac's work, coupled

with a quality of sex psychology unequalled in the English theatre since Edgar Sheepmeadow's *Girls will be Boys*, and Norman Chudd's miracle play in seventeen scenes, *Light*.

Miss Minaver's second act reminds one of Burrel's *Strange Experience of Miss Barnet*, except that in this case Osric is in the Guards and Violet is a society girl rather than an innkeeper's daughter.

Nevertheless, the play has many good points in its favour; and was well handled by Sir Gerald du Maurier (in extremely baggy trousers), and Mr. Ivor Novello (in a long red beard). The heroine was in the capable hands of Miss Gladys Cooper (she should get out of that tiresome habit of smoking backwards). Mr. Owen Nares contributed one of his usual irresistible cameos in Act III. Miss Minaver will probably write a fine play one day, and we must, to quote Sergizot, "*patienter*."

I have often heard Mr. Agate grumbling, with utter lack of conviction, that "these damned Sunday performances" completely ruin his day's golf. This attitude, I am convinced, is a sort of defiant gesture. He doesn't wish us to know that really the theatre means far more to him than most things; and he goes to each fresh play with a heart beating with hope.

On the rare occasions when even some of his yearnings towards the ideal are gratified, there is no one more generous and enthusiastic; he seems to possess in his praise and blame the knack of picking upon the finer subtleties that no one else has noticed.

To an author such as myself, at the very beginning, this is the most encouraging thing in the world, and I can say with real sincerity that I would sooner be blamed by Mr. Agate than praised by almost anyone else.

NOËL COWARD.

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Author's Note

THIS second volume of *The Contemporary Theatre* is again a collection of articles which have appeared in the columns of *The Sunday Times*.

The author is conscious that the title may be misleading, for the ground covered is merely that of the London commercial Theatre, half a dozen play-producing societies and one performance at Oxford—the area of the dramatic critic functioning round about Shaftesbury Avenue. But London remains, when all is mumbled and done, the hub of the English Theatre, and this book is intended to serve as an unpretentious record of that Theatre. To mark the contemporary sense allusions to "yesterday" and "last week" have been retained, the articles appearing exactly as printed, with a few unimportant exceptions.

The usual acknowledgments are proffered.

February, 1925

Eleonora Duse

THE death of Duse has robbed the civilised world of one of its noblest artists andmost exquisite spirits. The little world of the theatre mourns a great actress. There is a significant distinction here. Born to the theatre, Duse was not of the playhouse in the sense in which other great actresses have belonged to it. Bernhardt, Réjane, Ellen Terry, Mrs. Kendal—of these we may say that the stage was their whole existence. Take that away from them, and interest became impertinent. It was otherwise with Duse, with whom acting was not the be-all and end-all of existence, but an interruption of her own more poignant moods and sensibilities. You felt that the woman was greater than the player, that the mimic agonies of the stage were a pale reflection of more personal and more engrossing torment.

"All Duse's acting," wrote an early critic, "seems to come from a great depth, and to be only half-telling profound secrets." And the writer went on to declare that the artist failed in a lesser thing in order to triumph in a greater. The lesser thing was the straightforward business of acting, and it may be held that when doing rather than being was the matter in hand, the Italian

actress was not difficult to surpass. There is a sense in which she may be said not to have acted at all. Duse found nobility in every part she played, for the simple reason that she herself was noble, and there was no violence which she would not commit to wring that quality from such unpromising material as Marguerite Gauthier, Paula Tanqueray, and Magda. Strictly speakîng, she did not impersonate these creatures, but reeled them off perfunctorily, lying in wait, as it were, for some seed of generosity which she could cause to blossom magically into the perfect flower.

Lemaitre said of Duse's Marguerite that she played her like a grisette by Botticelli, a grisette of extreme distinction and "un peu préraphaélite," who could never have been imagined "riant faux dans les soupers, allumant les hommes, s'appliquer à leur manger beaucoup d'argent. . . ." The actress found, for Marguerite's surrender to Armand, "a gesture of religious ecstasy which Dumas certainly had not foreseen." The text of the play, even, was softened, and became the hapless story of two young lovers separated by one knew not quite what. Marguerite became "une pensionnaire grondée par un vieux monsieur." It may be doubted whether Sir Arthur Pinero would have recognised his demi-mondaine, and Sudermann his *cabotine*, in the rarefied creatures of this presentation. One felt that Duse was not concerned with them at all, or only in so far as they were material for transfiguration. Yet Mr. Archer, in a considered comparison between Duse and Bernhardt, has said that, in his

opinion, the Italian actress undoubtedly carried the palm in two of these plays, and also in *La Femme de Claude*.

Comparison between these two great players can hardly be more than a way of expressing different kinds of appreciation. Both artists opened up vistas into infinity—Bernhardt into a universe of concrete loveliness, made up of sun and sky and marble pillars, heavy with jewellery and the scent of flowers yet containing a mystical, ineffable corner or two in which she would play at halos and stained-glass windows, Duse into a world of twilight and cloisters, calm after storm, passion long dead, pity and everlasting regret. She was the actress for all unhappy women.

In those parts in which I saw both players the Frenchwoman seemed to me immeasurably superior, always. She was more human on the human plane, more ethereal on the ethereal. Sarah would make a living being of Marguerite and have great fun in turning Joan of Arc into a saint ; all Duse's creatures became saints as soon as her imagination gave them birth, compassionate hybrids with bodies on earth and minds in heaven. But just as Bernhardt surpassed Duse in characters of tragic elevation such as Phèdre, in the pasteboard nonsense of Fédora and La Tosca, in pure poetry like Pelléas, so the Italian actress turned the tables in modern *rôles* demanding sincerity and the suggestion of a passionate absorption in beauty outside and beyond the theatre. Sarah's characters began their lives on the stage and ended them there. Those of

Duse had a life outside ; she brought them with her to the theatre, and they accompanied her when she left.

In two of the plays which Duse gave on the occasion of her last visit to London—*The Lady from the Sea* and *Cosi Sia*—she was unsurpassable by any other actress. Nothing better in these two parts could have been conceived ; it is not to be imagined that Bernhardt could have been so good. From Ibsen, whose joy is a grimmer thing than other people's sorrow, Duse wrung a haunting beauty. Did the old Norwegian speak of mountain-tops, then it was made credible that there should be people to tread them. And in D'Annunzio's *La Gioconda* she gave grief its noblest wear. Eminent critics have spoken of the vivacity, mischief, and delight of her hostess in *La Locandiera*, But that was long ago. Life was never kind to Duse, and perhaps she was of the temperament which takes gently to martyrdom and self-pity. Of late years fun was not in her, and her stage creations wore an air of doing penance. Duse did not pose *pour la douleur*, but it seemed fantastic to imagine that she could eat or drink. Contact, even with her art, was necessarily a little frigid, and it was only in the actress's very greatest moments that you could feel that you were sitting in the theatre for the fun of the thing. At other times some mood of contrition was not ill-suited.

Duse's place in the history of the stage is assured. She triumphed in spite of many things—her own aversion from make-up, which imposed upon the theatre a Marguerite Gauthier with grey hair and the

air of a highly respectable governess, the over-praise of the 'nineties and subsequent oblivion, the ecstasy of the highbrows who understood Italian, and the even greater extravagance of those who did not. Technicians will doubtless continue to discuss the play of the wonderful hands, which often hid the face and elucidated a meaning, the constant plucking at gown and shawl which attained to the dignity of a rite, the modulations of the expressive voice, the changing aspects of the eloquent features. But the lay public will remember this player as a great soul laid religiously bare, as a great spirit which made the playhouse its temple. Duse's mind was of the stuff which endures.

April 27.

William Archer

TO the younger generation William Archer was, perhaps, not more than a name. But a great name. And before we can decide how great, it is as well to take a look at the position of the English theatre when this earnest young Scotchman first tackled it. " As I look back to 'seventy-nine and the early 'eighties," he wrote in his last book, " I confess I am puzzled to conceive how anyone with the smallest pretension to intelligence could in those years seriously occupy himself with the English theatre."

It was, indeed, at a very low ebb. The age was not for tragedy. The tide of Robertsonian comedy, having usefully swept away the melodrama of Bulwer Lytton and Sheridan Knowles, had retreated, leaving high and dry the rubbish of H. J. Byron and little else. Henry Arthur Jones was brooding over *The Silver King*, and George R. Sims was in the imminent throes of *The Lights o' London*. Pinero's *The Profligate*—that, to us, terribly old-fashioned play—was not to break new ground for another ten years, and Mr. Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* might not startle the bourgeoisie for another three. Irving, at the Lyceum, was giving mighty encouragement to the past, and at the Haymarket

Sydney Grundy was persuading everybody that the trick of English playwriting had been definitely lost to France.

The English theatre, then, was empty; and the task of writing about it was largely in the hands of hacks who, too incompetent to be venal, had little gift of discernment, and mistook the chatter of the *coulisses* for the body of the play. Of serious criticism there was little, always excepting the careful work of Joseph Knight and the perlustrations of Clement Scott, who saw the highest without being able to perceive it. Little serious criticism in London we must say, for Shaw, Symons, Beerbohm, and Walkley were yet to write. There was a small band connected with a North of England newspaper—W. T. Arnold, Oliver Elton, Allan Monkhouse, and C. E. Montague—who were determined that the drama in this country should rank among the arts, and that the great dramatist, if he could be found, should be considered as seriously as the great painter or composer. In William Archer they found a brother and a leader.

At once Archer pointed to Norway, where Ibsen's sun was rising. The young critic took up his appointment to the *London Figaro* in 1879, and it was in December of that year that *A Doll's House* was published. In 1880 Archer's translation of *The Pillars of Society* was performed at the Gaiety Theatre, and then came the Ibsen vogue. But vogue is a discreditable word, and the blows which Archer struck for the Norwegian did more than set a fashion. For a time

the battle went ding-dong : Archer—with the moral support of Sir Edmund Gosse's essay on *Peer Gynt*, and the active and gallant co-operation of Elizabeth Robins, Janet Achurch, and Charles Charrington—*versus* Clement Scott, who had at his back all the cohorts of British stupidity. Mr. Shaw lending a hand, victory went to the right side, and Ibsen was generally accepted as the greatest world-dramatist since Molière, possibly with the mental reservation that half-a-guinea could be more amusingly bestowed. But it was the recognition of Ibsen which paved the way for the theatre of Shaw, Barker, Galsworthy, and the Manchester school. Whatever Archer may have become in later years is no matter. The lack of lustre and humour in his writing, the fault of using logic as master instead of servant, a certain dourness in his opposition to the sensuous and temperamental side of acting, the hint of the schoolmaster—all these are nothing weighed against the fact that the renascence of the British theatre began with Ibsen, whose sponsor was William Archer.

Against the now familiar translations a certain woodenness is sometimes urged, and must be admitted. The plays read, and act, like translations, and every one of the characters has the same lingo. The fault is due to excess of conscientiousness, which was Archer's weakness as well as his strength. In one of his introductions he tells us that whereas he could not hope to steer clear of "stiff literalness" he is thankful to have avoided "lax paraphrase." Laxity and William Archer—the thing were a contradiction in terms.

When, therefore, a character in one of the plays says "Duty! The word stings like a whip," we are not surprised to find a foot-note to the effect that the word in the original is the onomatopœic "Pligt!"

It may not be out of place here to give the gist of a passage in *The Old Drama and the New*, in which Archer laid down his fundamental principles of dramatic criticism. We are to ask three questions concerning every serious play. Does it present a reasonably faithful imitation of the visible and audible surfaces of life without caricature or shiftings from one plane of convention to another? Is the story developed, and are the characters presented, in such a way as to make best use of the mechanism of the theatre, and so beget in the audience emotions of growing interest, suspense, anticipation, and sudden, vivid realisation? We are then told that a play may come through both these tests and be "artistically trivial and intellectually negligible." Then comes the third test. A play, to be a great play, must—or so this critic declared—*say* and *mean* something. Seeing it, we must have undergone an experience, and leave the theatre intellectually richer and morally better.

Well, there are objections to be advanced. The tests recommended here will answer very well with Æschylus, Shakespeare, Shaw or Susan Glaspell, but there is a whole range to which they do not apply—the vast, indeed, the preponderant bulk of playwriting which lies between trivial and negligible entertainment and the fine piece of dramatic literature. By that

third test such plays as *Caste*, *Diplomacy*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, and *Our Betters* must be condemned, which would be absurd. But I will not labour the point. Archer's writing made it plain from the first that conduct, which to Matthew Arnold was three parts of life, was to this critic the whole of drama. But such was Archer's consistency that you could, given familiarity with his work, make accurate allowance for the moral bias. Indeed, upon occasion he will make the allowance himself. For example, he states of the St. James's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* that the church scene is greatly under-acted. "As a private citizen and a human being, I prefer that this should be so. If such a painful and abominable scene must be acted at all, let it be under-acted by all means."

Archer was the friend of under-statement, and at a banquet given to him by the Critic's Circle warned his younger colleagues against likening the, by implication, geese of to-day with such swans as Rachel and Talma. Archer was sparing in his use of the word "great," and commendation from him was deserved indeed. When Sarah Bernhardt died he made the cautious admission that "during her last years at the Théâtre Français, she was certainly an exquisite creature"—a grudging measure of praise worth whole volumes of any other man's. To Irving's defects Archer did more than justice; whether he was fully alive to the genius of that great actor is another matter. And this critic must have been an exceedingly difficult man to act to. There he would sit, his large baleful eye moving

uneasily under that disquieting dome—for Archer was a big man in every sense—unprovoked to tears or laughter, and, to look at, about as easily impressionable as a stone wall. We may say of him, perhaps, that he knew what temperament should be but not what it was. I guess him to have listened to music and looked at pictures as a man of letters rather than as musician or painter, and it is certain that, had he detected it, he would not have approved the tendency of modern stage-production—"Theatre," without the definite article, our young men call it—to run away from letters to the condition of music, painting, and the dance.

But if the theatre be regarded as a machine for the exploiting of ideas, then Archer was magnificently your man. Intellectually he could not be rushed, but neither was he a laggard. This critic had all the qualities of his defects, and if he brought to his winnowing an almost awful sanity, at least he did not do the English theatre the supreme disservice of treating it flippantly. And, in spite of his theorising, Archer undoubtedly knew a good play when he saw one. Hear him, for example, after he has been to see that very innocent comedy *Lord and Lady Algy*. First he must lay the ghost of immorality, appearing to him alone. If the play be attacked on moral grounds he cannot easily defend it. Its tone is the reverse of edifying, its ethics are those of the betting ring, its point of honour is that of the Divorce Court. Worst of all, the reprobate hero of the piece is never more sympathetic than when he is

drunk ! The play's ethical elevation is that of Restoration Comedy, except that its cynicism is kindly instead of brutal. But does not this make matters worse, since thereby the evil becomes more insidious ? Happily, he has little faith in the power of the stage to teach good or ill by direct example. Then follows this passage :

> This play will certainly not raise the tone of fast society, but neither will it make anyone a gambler or a drunkard who would otherwise have been a staid and sober citizen. . . . The truly immoral work, to my thinking, is that which either does, or ought to, sap our self-respect and make us ashamed of our species. That is not the effect of Mr. Carton's play. It has rather something of a tonic quality in helping us to feel that, after all, this is an amusing world to live in.

And the critic ends by saying of a piece which defies all his canons of criticism, that it is all it pretends to be, and more, that its literary workmanship is excellent and its scenic skill consummate. This passage shows very exactly, I think, the normal processes of Archer's mind.

Of this writer it may equally be said that he was all he pretended to be, and more. His literary workmanship was adequate, though he scorned the tricks of fastidiousness and felicity. The American's description of Matthew Arnold—" my idea of nowhere to go for a laugh "—might have been applied to Archer. Yet I think that he was conscious of the demon of dullness dogging his elbow, and that at times he tried to exorcise it, and to refrain from pontificating. He would

struggle to be amusing ; and that he had not a mastery of the fal-lals of the business is no great reproach to one who over the main body had complete command. He could be severe when the occasion demanded : witness his condemnation of Clement Scott's "bungler," gratuitously hurled at Ibsen, as "the most colossal ineptitude ever uttered under the guise of criticism." Morality may too often have been Archer's preoccupation, but he could never have desired, like Scott, to leave the theatre a happier and a sillier man. To the young and earnest student Archer was the guide, philosopher, and friend ; his writings always had dignity and bespoke perfect integrity and native gentleness.

January 4, 1925.

Arthur Roberts

ON Friday afternoon, at the Alhambra Theatre, a testimonial matinée was accorded to one of the greatest artists the English music hall has known.

In the days when the halls were still happily unregenerate Arthur Roberts made one of a quartet of stars whose brilliance has never been surpassed. "Arthur's" compeers in magnitude were Dan Leno, Marie Lloyd, and Vesta Tilley. Other luminaries—George Robey, George Graves, Lauder, and the Brothers Griffiths—winked across Leicester Square's evening sky, but their hour was not yet. Or one might say that the small part of the world which we call the West End of London was for thirty years Arthur Roberts's oyster. Certain it is that the flourish with which he opened it has passed into a legend.

From dim memories, and according to precise account, those 'eighties and 'nineties were delicious days. At a guess I should synchronise the height of Arthur's fame with another jubilee—that of the Great Lady of 1887. For Arthur was always essentially Victorian, in the sense in which a mutinous sailor belongs to his ship. His songs and, above all, the blazing indiscretions of his patter offered the youth of that period a way of

escape from over-insistence upon the proprieties. Has not Mr. Lytton Strachey, or some other student of manners, advised us that as freedom in the narrow world outside the music hall broadened down from precedent to precedent, so that comprehensive stage became less and less tempted to take liberties with our notions of the polite? "Give me a cab-fare, ducky; I'm feeling most awfully queer," enraptured our fathers; young ears would be deaf to such incitement to-day.

At some period in the 'nineties, and in that volume in which Mr. George Moore first gave to the world the history of his life, allusion is made to this actor. He is called, if I remember rightly, the embodiment of the brandy-and-soda young man-about-town. To us to-day Arthur Roberts stands for something more. He has become an era in epitome. He stands for jingling hansoms in the days when rubber-tyres were first invented and the horse gave warning of approach by a little tinkling bell. He stands for a type of London night-life before the days of those sober and dreary institutions, the modern cabaret and night-club. It would not surprise one to hear that the first crush hat was pressed by this actor's white kid glove to a wine-stained shirt-front and a gardenia worn ever so slightly awry, or that "coxy-bobus" was invented expressly to fit those raffish and slightly intoxicated young men whom this comedian held up as the mirror of gentility.

Arthur, on the stage, adumbrated that ideal which "Pitcher" presented so unblushingly in the pages of a

blushing weekly. He stood four-square to the languid zephyrs of the enervating 'nineties, and his breezy nonsense had no truck with the roses and raptures of the period. Had any poet sung him, it must have been Kipling. And I am not sure that the most virile of poets has not sung this most virile of jesters. A stanza in *The Song of the Banjo* comes to mind.

> In the twilight, on a bucket upside down,
> Hear me babble what the weakest won't confess—
> I am Memory and Torment—I am Town!
> I am all that ever went with evening dress.

But all memory is not torment, and in that part of it which is delight must be recollection of the Empire in the old days, and of Arthur Roberts. His ten minutes were the most delirious known to the evening-dress *habitués* of the halls. Within the compass of the tiniest of art-forms this actor showed infinite resource. He was a comedian of genius and a man of wit, and has well earned that leisure the means whereof a never-forgetful public and the generous colleagues of a later day have now showered upon him.

November 16.

Shakespeare

"Hamlet"

O.U.D.S.

TWO difficulties meet me at the outset. I have always regarded Oxford with something of the awe and wonder which a certain obscure person felt for Christminster. For me as for little Jude the smoke from those venerable chimneys holds something of the mysticism of incense. I ponder with Mr. Hardy's carter upon the "noble-minded men, able to earn hundreds by thinking out loud." Also, perhaps, a little upon those "strong young fellows that can earn a'most as much in silver cups." In neither case does it seem decent that a stranger, on a pilgrimage, should venture upon criticism. But since one is invited, nay, pressed thereto, with all imaginable incitements in the way of hospitality, how refuse? And then the further point arises: What standard of criticism is to be adopted? Surely to lower the standard were to offer these young men a grave discourtesy? They are amateurs, and it is a good fault if their reach something exceed their grasp.

Probably no greater disservice could be done to a young actor than to set rumours on foot concerning his astonishing prowess. If the merit be there the

spectators can be relied upon to vie with each other in expressing not only astonishment, but gratification. This disservice had been freely done to Mr. Gyles Isham, who was to play Hamlet. It was whispered about that we were to behold a combination of Forbes-Robertson's sweetness and Irving's tragic power. What happened, when the marriage did not take place, was that one found oneself inclined to seize at defects where one should have been eager to catalogue merits. This was obviously unfair to the young actor, who should have been allowed to make an unprejudiced first appearance in this most exacting *rôle*.

Mr. Isham has a great many things in his favour. He has a countenance apt for the expression of noble sentiments, that sweep of the throat and set of the head which become the tragic actor. His voice is melodious and well modulated ; his bearing is both manly and modest ; his gestures are easy and graceful. He inspires liking. You would say, too, that his Hamlet is his own in the sense that he appears to have read it for himself and not to have copied any other actor. I would almost go further and suggest that possibly Mr. Isham may not have seen many performances of this play. If the contrary be the case, how account for the omission to make effective certain lines and passages which have a prescriptive and immemorial right to significance and even emphasis ? One missed, for example, the wistfulness of

> For every man hath business and desire,
> Such as it is.

This, following the great outburst, " O all you host of heaven ! O earth ! What else ? " is Hamlet's first recognition that the duty of remembrance is to set him outside the daily walk of common men. One missed, too, the mockery of " the air, look you," in which Hamlet explains to stupid Rosencrantz and silly Guildenstern what he means by " this most excellent canopy." Mr. Isham took in his stride these lines, as also the phrase " quintessence of dust," which should be searched for ; while the sententious " If it be now, 'tis not to come," and so on, which is Hamlet thinking aloud, were gabbled as a schoolboy gabbles a piece he has got by rote. The little scene with Horatio, which Forbes-Robertson used to make so affecting, slipped by almost unnoticed, perhaps for the reason that one friend cannot wear another in his heart's core if he keep almost the width of the stage between them. These omissions are to be stressed only in so far as they show that Mr. Isham is no copyist. On the other hand, certain lines such as " Go on ; I'll follow thee " to the Ghost, " I loved you not " to Ophelia, and " I loved you ever " to Laertes were delivered with individual beauty and tenderness.

It would, in my view, be just nonsense to say that this Hamlet was more courtier than soldier, or more poet than pessimist. He was just an extremely gracious and graceful young man tackling each line intelligently as it came along. Which, after all, may have been the way in which the part was written. Critics still debate furiously whether there is anything psychological, in

Ibsen's sense, about Hamlet. Professor Bradley, for example, holds the moodiness of the Dane, his whimseys and neuroticism, to proceed from some precedent *état d'âme* in Hamlet himself. Other authorities of equal brilliance have suggested that Hamlet is not a "real" person at all, but a projection of his creator's mind, a vague something "held in solution in the dramatist's consciousness until it is precipitated in the form of words written upon paper." The whole play is, then, a symphonic poem like Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*, that is, programme music with themes labelled "Meditations on Suicide," "Advice to a Mother," "The Art of Acting."

This is all very well in the study, but note now what happens when your great romantic actor comes along. He exhibits himself in the act of meditating, advising, lecturing, and so forth, and forces his own personality upon you with such tremendous insistence that you believe him to have forced it upon the Hamlet of the printed page. He deceives you into thinking that he has "created" Hamlet, whereas he has only created himself. No actor can give more of Hamlet's sweetness and dark perversity than, first, he himself can conceive, and, second, than he has taught his body to convey. We can have no means of determining how deeply Hamlet has bitten into the soul of Mr. Isham, or any other actor; we can but judge by his outward show. And, frankly, Mr. Isham exhibited no great depth of emotional experience. He was debonair throughout, and a thought once quitted was

left behind for ever. He turned readily and cheerfully from one set of emotions to another, which never became part of him. But, I repeat, the *rôle* may have been written in that way. The whole performance was less like Hamlet than the young man in the Elegy who, after brushing the dews away, lies him down by the nodding beech and pores, not upon the babbling brook, but upon a well-thumbed Shakespeare.

There is no unkindness here. The real unkindness would be to say those things now which there is reason to hope are reserved for this young actor in the future. Mr. Isham can go forward in the knowledge that he already shows—and showing, not feeling, is the business of the actor—considerable sensitiveness to beauty, and nowhere the slightest trace of the commonplace or vulgar. It is to be imagined that he would play Orlando, and even Romeo, to perfection. The step from these to the full range of passion and power which we demand from Hamlet is too much to expect from a young actor just out of his teens, whose performance was surely sufficiently remarkable to be appraised at its proper value.

Mr. R. W. Speaight delivered the speech of the First Player better than I have ever known. It had, quite rightly, all those defects of over-emphasis which suggests Hamlet's kindly corrections. And this excess, also quite rightly, partook not of clumsiness, but of the *tour de force*. Mr. A. Tandy was an excellent, if very youthful, Laertes. He gave to the reiterated " What ceremony else ? " a greater poignancy than the super-

ficial one, recalling the insufficiency of all last rites. The Horatio of Mr. G. A. Gardiner was extremely sympathetic. Mr. V. Whitaker played Claudius with becoming gravity, but it was a pity that he looked so like Shylock. Mrs. Florence Glossop-Harris was faced with the usual difficulty of all Queen Gertrudes—that of covering up Shakespeare's failure to tell us why she should exchange Hyperions and mountains for Satyrs and moors. Perhaps the part can never be satisfactorily done. Miss Lila Maravan was an appealing Ophelia, though I cannot imagine why in the play scene she should wear a hat straight out of Bond Street, with a plume a yard long. One wondered whether she'd wear a feather. . . . But I seem to have strayed into the wrong play.

Mr. J. B. Fagan's setting was generally admired. It is on the lines of the permanent framework for the Phœnix Society's plays, only a trifle more elaborate. We had been promised " geometry and curtains." The curtains were excellent, and their disposition gave a sense of atmosphere and height. The lighting throughout was admirable, except that it occasionally failed to give the outdoor sense. The " geometry " was confined to two tiny spiral staircases, which were " intriguing " for the first hour or so. But when Hamlet ascended one of them to go to his mother's closet, and in the next scene appeared on the same old plane to which Gertrude had obligingly descended bringing her apartment with her, and when, moreover, it became obvious that neither staircase led to anywhere habitable

—well, after a time they became just a little irritating. The performance was taken at a pace which, with the simplified setting, permitted the giving of almost the entire play, including the magnificent " How all occasions do inform against me " soliloquy. Some six hundred lines only were omitted, and, after all, what Fortinbras should, would, or might have said to Voltimand is not evidence.

February 17.

"King Lear"

THE PHŒNIX SOCIETY

WHAT are the essential qualities for an actor who shall play Lear? First, one hazards, a voice which shall not be too small for the play, like a tiny sail on a big vessel. Next, a presence which shall suggest not decrepitude, but the sense of the completeness of old age—the fulness of years, in a word. After that we must have pathos, a quality defying study, given unaccountably to one actor and withheld willy-nilly from another. Lastly, a quality of ecstasy must be conveyed in which the soul stands beside the body, and becomes answerable to laws which it were unreasonable to enjoin upon mere clay.

Records of anything like an adequate Lear are scanty. Salvini, they say, had the pathos, but I beg leave to doubt whether any Latin could give my postulated ecstasy its moral texture and English colouring. ("Lear" is as definitely English as "Le Cid" is French.) Turn this tragedy into an opera, with Cordelia for heroine and Edgardo, *alias* Edgar, for hero, the old man providing the heavy business as *père radoteur*, with bass rumblings by Massenet or Puccini

—call the thing *La Fille du Tyran*, and where is the Frenchman or Italian who would see any wrong?

Irving's Lear had pathos too, but only a clever simulation of power; it was useless for him to spout cataracts and hurricanoes in a voice which broke to a piping treble. In 1881 at the old Princess's Theatre Edwin Booth obtained what a critic of the period described as "an almost unqualified success," finding shortcomings in the matter of dignity alone. Phelps, twenty years earlier, went mad too soon. Charles Kean, according to Henry Morley, treated the King of the first half of the play as a comic character. The performances of Betterton, Quin, Barry and John Kemble, who, like all the actors from 1681 to Macready in 1838, used Nahum Tate's version, are dark in the mists of time. "Tate," says Lamb, "has put his hook in the nostrils of this Leviathan, for Garrick and his followers to draw it about more easily." Of Garrick's Lear we know that it shook Dr. Johnson out of his wits, which is a considerable testimonial.

Hazlitt bestirred himself even more than usual on the occasion of Kean's performance in 1820. He begins by reminding the reader how, when Garrick knelt to repeat the curse, the first row in the pit stood up in order to see him better, and the second row, unwilling to lose precious moments in remonstrating, stood up too; and so, by a tacit movement, the whole pit. John Kemble, "that old campaigner," was next

noted as having been " very great in the curse." Kean, Hazlitt goes on to record, thought no end of his own Lear, and said coxcombically that " he was very much obliged to London audiences for the good opinion they had hitherto expressed of him, but that when they came to see him over the dead body of Cordelia they would have a very different notion of the matter." To which the essayist wittily rejoins that as Kean persisted in Tate's version, London had no chance to see him " over the body."

The greatest of English tragic actors proved, on the whole, to be disappointing. He " chipped a bit off the character here and there." He was too violent at first and too near mere dotage at the end. He scolded like Timon where he should have recited a Hymn to the Penates. He expressed Lear's crosses one by one, in single images of ruin, in place of a growing desolation. His face did not " encrust and stiffen into amazement." In one thing only had the actor been great—the attitude in which he put himself to repeat the curse. " He threw himself on his knees ; lifted up his arms like withered stumps ; threw his head quite back, and in that position, as if severed from all that held him to society, breathed a heart-struck prayer, like the figure of a man obtruncated." Probably the greatest of all Lears was that of the great German actor Ludwig Devrient. But I must leave the past and come to the Phœnix.

It cannot be said of Mr. Hubert Carter, as of an earlier actor who essayed Lear, that " it was not

thought that he could make anything of it, and it was not, therefore, said that he did." Great things were expected, and some of them were achieved. This actor belongs to the school of Mr. Oscar Asche, the excellencies of whose art have been compared to long driving at golf. Now the secret of long driving, Mr. Blackwell once told us, was to grip like the devil and hit like hell, and Mr. Carter, when I saw him play the lead in *Kismet* on tour, seemed to me to give Mr Asche a good thirty yards and to be quite as straight. In the mind's eye, then, he lacked nothing which should make for a powerful and effective Lear, except, possibly, what I have called the ecstatic quality. Which just shows how wrong one can be in previsions of acting, since this was the one aspect which was presented with entire success.

To begin with, Mr. Carter had not the right quality of voice. It was too light in timbre and rose to hysterical whinings and whimperings where it should have boomed and rumbled. Wind in the rigging will not do for Lear ; in the big speeches you should feel that not only the actor, but you, the spectator, are supported on a sea of sound. The part is largely a symphony for the voice. Then, Lear was too lusty. Let me admit that there is a difficulty here. What is *not* wanted is a display of senility like that of the Veteran of Waterloo ; you cannot palsy your way through this storm. But there should be some evidence of four-score's weakening of mind and body, and this Lear looked not more than a well-preserved seventy,

thought like sixty, and waved his arms, gat on to his knees and ambled up and down the stage like a boy of fifty. I have seen Falstaffs less jovial. All this is not to say more than that the actor was not physically suited. How about the spiritualities ?

Well, the whole performance reminded me of the neat piling up of points by a boxer who lacks a punch : this little piece of irony was capitally delivered ; that litre of passion was neatly decanted ; the kindliness of the old man was touchingly shown in his covering of Edgar's nakedness ; the decline to madness—about which Shakespeare took such extraordinary care—was conscientiously done, though in the end one was left with the feeling of an old roysterer with the wine in rather than with the wit out ; the famous colloquy between Gloucester and Lear was conducted with an extreme nicety ; the recognition of Cordelia had all the appurtenances of pathos ; the dying was a full-lunged affair. But we waited in vain for the onslaught on sensibility which should overthrow us quite, and as the afternoon wore on I, personally, began to find my sympathies centering in Gloucester. Perhaps Mr. Frank Cochrane acted too well here ? I avow that he made Gloucester's case so pitiful that I forgot all about Lear, whose entry to his blinded subject came as a surprise. Yet that this was Lear, or the ecstatic part of him, was demonstrated by the fact that at the words " Ha ! Goneril, with a white beard ! " Gloucester's viewlessness sank again properly to nothing in comparison with Lear's wide-

eyed despair, which surveys the universe and knows no alleviation.

If Mr. Carter failed to give the whole of this tremendous figure—though he was always interesting and even respectable—he failed in the greatest company, and perhaps for the reason which Coleridge assigned for some inadequate performance of Macready. " He is, I fear, too improving an actor to be a man of genius. That little ill-looking vagabond, Kean, never improved in anything. In some things he could not, and in others he would not." This last reproach cannot be levelled at Mr. Carter. He tried his utmost. If we were not in Lear's presence we were in his antechamber.

Mr. Frank Cellier played Kent as he plays everything else, that is with a perfection which I begin to find monotonous. He even got humour into this Enobarbus of another mould, and his closing sentences touched profound beauty. When will this actor fly a kite in Romeo or Antony, and so give me a chance to have at him ? Perfect, too, were the later scenes of Mr. Henry Oscar's Edmund ; while Mr. Duncan Yarrow was excellent when he was unclothed and in his wrong mind. It is pleasant to be able to say that the Fool was just bad—pleasant, because I am always prepared to maintain Mr. Leon Quartermaine to be our best exponent of the sensitive and exquisite. Critical integrity must be preserved. The people in this play are early Britons ; they are dressed and talk like Elizabethans ; Mr. Quartermaine strolled in from

a day of 'bus-strikes. He *meant* all right ; you could see that by the way he laid his head on Lear's bosom. Mr. Quartermaine's difficulty was that, at any cost, he must not be Persian, must be Beowulf rather than Ishak. He ended by being an emphatic Briton, but not an early one ; and a billycock might with propriety have surmounted his lank and natural locks. But, then, even a " bad " performance by this actor is not without a great measure of joy, and always he dips into a natural well of poetry as lesser artists dip into Mr. Clarkson's shop for wigs.

Cordelia is a " gumph " or, as we say in Lancashire, " gormless," and was played as such, very prettily and appealingly, by Miss Gwen Ffrangçon-Davies. If Cordelia hadn't been a noodle—*pace* the shade of Helen Faucit and those ecstatic ladies who write whole volumes upon the psychology of Queen Gertrude and Ophelia—if Cordelia had had her wits about her there would have been no play. (Decidedly she would go well into opera with the song, " Mon cœur se ferme aux enchères.") It is difficult for the Duchesses of Albany and Cornwall not to conjure up the Ugly Sisters of the Brothers Griffiths, but the exponents at the Phœnix surmounted the danger successfully. Miss Constance Robertson as Goneril was content to be baleful and uncomplicatedly chief villainness. Miss Stella Arbenina played Regan with great *finesse*, spoke with excellent point, and, indeed, endowed the wretch with life outside the play. This Regan, you felt, had an anterior existence, and if she had survived the

poison, would have provided Mr. St. John Ervine with a prose sequel of exquisite malice—" King Lear's Daughter." That is if Mr. Gordon Bottomley had not previously snapped her up in blank verse.

April 6.

"The Merchant of Venice"

THE "OLD VIC"

"NOTHING is good," said Portia, "without respect," or, as we say, "circumstances alter cases." There are horses for courses, and why not players for playhouses? It would be idle, I imagine, to consider what one might have thought of Mr. Hay Petrie's Shylock as the central figure in one of the old Lyceum festivals. "Look in the *Telegraph*, my love," you can hear some country squire saying on the eve of a projected visit to town, "and see what Mr. Irving is giving." How, in front of that audience and in that playhouse could the great actor present anything but the heroic?

You have seen those "Protean" artists of the music hall who, by putting on another shape of hat pretend to be Ignatius Loyola, Savonarola, Swedenborg, and all the time remain plain Mr. Roscius Jones. I do not mean that there were no differences between Irving's Shylock, Wolsey, and Becket. Of course there were differences, but you felt that they were superficial, and that each character had only just, by the merest

accident, missed being Archbishop of Canterbury or Mr. Gladstone. Perforce Irving was tremendously pathetic as the Jew. Perforce he made touching business with Shylock's return to his empty house—of which Shakespeare says never a word—concluding with a terrific show of injured innocence in the matter of his apostasy.

Probably all that the old Lyceum audience knew of Shylock's race was the accounts they had read of the patriarchs of the East and the accounts they had kept with their descendants of the West.

But the audience which assembles in the Waterloo Road is not so simple. Half of it remembers *Potash and Perlmutter;* the other half knows their originals. All of it realises, at least subconsciously, that the Jews are one of the greatest races which have ever peopled the earth, and the richest of all in intellect and what theatre-folk call "character." Irving's Shylock had the brains but lacked the characteristic temperament. He was not noticeably Jewish; or perhaps I should say that he had the grandeur, the mysticism, the austerity and poetry of the race, but lacked the familiar touches which make for recognition. It was a magnanimous and heroic portrait which entirely burst the play, turning it into a tragedy with an irrelevant epilogue tacked on at the end, retained to give Miss Terry a chance in the same way that *Nance Oldfield* was used to eke out *The Bells.*

Mr. Petrie's Shylock restores the play's balance, and brings it back into the region of comedy. There is

pathos in his final exit, but the sun has not gone out for ever, and there is what the film people call "continuity" in the moon-gazing of Lorenzo and Jessica. This is a Shylock *intime*, Potash's neighbour, the wealthy relative of the stall-holders in the New Cut near by, the tree whose sprigs enliven our West End on Saturday nights, the friend whose interest may be purchased. He has as much pathos as may become the central figure in a comedy, sufficient dignity, and a nicely controlled amount of power. This Shylock is not a Lear uprooting oaks and leaving them lying "around"; the storm passes, and we are ready to bask in the sun again. The actor was extraordinarily good in the scene with Solanio and Salarino, which he began with a kind of whirling, backward entrance, like a Dervish converted to Judaism. It was obvious which of his losses was the considerable one, and "I know not what's spent in the search" went to the heart. Grief for Jessica ranked third; second in injury was the affront put upon *his house*. This, I submit, was right. It was clearly linked up with the solicitude of

> But stop my house's ears, I mean my casements:
> Let not the sound of shallow foppery enter
> My sober house.

and the later

> Nay, take my life and all; pardon not that:
> You take my house, when you do take the prop
> That doth sustain my house.

The sense has changed here, but it is significant that

the old man should, in his extremity, turn for a metaphor to his fixed idea of the house. For the house is the family, and that, in turn, means the race. The proof, even of a Jewish pudding, must be in the eating; and it is to be recorded that the audience exhibited a delightful apprehension of a familiar and heightened intimacy. To my mind this was the Jew of Shakespeare's imagining—halfway between the pre-Macklin buffoons and the high priest of Irving.

The play's remaining characters, all excellently played in this revival, are a poor lot. Antonio confesses himself a sheep; Bassanio is a spendthrift who pledges his friend's life that he may give routs and go a-wooing; Gratiano has the mentality of a medical student engaged in a "rag"; Lorenzo is a receiver of stolen goods, Morocco a windbag, and Arragon a Turveydrop Junior. Jessica is unworthy of her race. Hazlitt makes the silly remark that he should like Lorenzo better if he had not married a Jewess; the boot is really on the other leg. Nerissa is nobody. Remains Portia, who, saving everybody's reverence, isn't a person at all but a part for a leading lady. Miss Terry made her so delightful, not because she was like Portia, but because Portia was like Miss Terry. Miss Florence Saunders did very well indeed, but a little of even the very best in this character goes a long way. I feel about Portia's pleadings, subterfuges, and skittishness as Mr. Bennet did about Mary's singing—"That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough." And when is somebody going to pluck up

courage and declare the "quality of mercy" speech to be excellent copy-book ethics but negligible poetry?

What, by the way, was the Shakespearean meaning of the word "convenient"? Balthasar said, "Madam, I go with all convenient speed," and dawdled off like a snail. But shouldn't he have gone with "appropriate" speed—that is, quickly—as he was commanded? A small point, and, anyhow, the actor got his laugh.

April 13.

"Measure for Measure"

THE FELLOWSHIP OF PLAYERS

HOW modern this play is! What a delight your "advanced" playwright would have taken in pointing out the evils which result when a virtue is pushed beyond reason. Chastity is a blessing, he would say, but not as this lady conceived it. Isabella, chastity's spokeswoman, is too much the "thing ensky'd and sainted"; she has no place by the fireside. It was an early critic who first pointed out that we do not feel the same confidence in the virtue that is sublimely good at another's expense as if it had been put to some less disinterested trial. There is no more to be said, except, perhaps, that we feel that Shakespeare would not necessarily have drawn a less elevating moral if he had given his working out a radical twist and called the play *The Magnanimous Virgin*. Later writers have done this, and have been absolved from the charge of corruption.

As it is, Shakespeare leaves Isabella between the devil and the deep sea. If she be ice-cold we class her as a prig and take no further interest in her; if she warm to any semblance of humanity we resent her failure to live up, at the critical moment, to humanity and

sisterhood. We have got to believe in Isabella and dislike her, or take some sort of liking and then not believe in her. Probably we should attach importance to the play's date. It belongs to the *Lear* period, when the dramatist brooded most sombrely over the dark passions and dilemmas of the world ; and it may be that he was not bent upon creating a " sympathetic " heroine. The speech beginning :

> O you beast !
> O faithless coward ! O dishonest wretch !
> Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice ?

is of the same mood and temper as Lear's :

> Thou shalt not die ; die for adultery ! No.

although, superficially, they appear to be the flattest of contradictions. Both are frenzied with the scorn of humanity's baser aspects ; both show what has been called the " tormented unreticence of the very pure."

Add to this most difficult of heroines a hero who is also the play's villain, and unpopularity is assured. Angelo is a great part, though no actor can make him entirely convincing. The trouble is not that we cannot " see " him as amorist, but that we do not believe in his precedent rigour. Claudio is not a " nice " person, though his naturalness has never been questioned. The Duke is an imbecile—a chairman who deserts his post to see how " Mr. Vice " will get through the toasts. His excuse about a stricter administration of justice since baby has taken to beating the nurse is merely a device—and a senseless one—for getting the

play going. There is an enormous humbugging power in great acting. When, for example, Mr. Courtenay Thorpe played the Duke, he enwrapped the silly fellow in such semblance of flesh and blood that he became credible, and hung upon his shoulders a mantle of so much dignity and grace that the speech " Be absolute for death " rose above its poetry and became sense. The argument is as specious as any you shall hear at the Old Bailey ; it is many years since I heard this actor deliver it, and I have not forgotten a single intonation.

On Sunday the part was not well played, and one missed the humbugging. The play came to an end where it must always do—with Isabella's rending of Claudio. Magnificent up to this part, it peters out. Angelo makes no more appearances that matter, and we spend the rest of the evening in watching Shakespeare's efforts to weave tragic issues to some stuff of comedy. All the broad and sweeping lines of the play are now broken up into petty plots about loose-livers whose heads are supposed to be off, and loose-thinkers whose heads are never properly on. Does the Duke look for happiness in Isabella ? We should like to take him on one side and read him Cayley Drummle's description of the first Mrs. Tanqueray. " Marble arms and black velvet " hits off Isabella exactly. Angelo is to marry for a penance, but we do not envy Mariana. Neither do we pity her ; Ninny's tomb would have become her well. Lucio, too, is in for an unquiet house ; and we do not know enough about

Juliet to discuss Claudio's future *ménage*. What a fuss they made in those days about forms and ceremonies ! What a confounding of morality and " lines."

Exception has often been taken to the more admittedly comic characters. There, again, the matter is largely one of acting. Mr. Andrew Leigh took all the offensiveness out of Pompey, and played him with a charity which stimulated the house to equal generosity of understanding. How human he made the rogue, a jackanapes not to be utterly condemned ! Mr. Baliol Holloway's fantasy is not on a par with his heavy tragedy, and I will not insist that his Lucio was a great success. Messrs. J. Leslie Firth, Wallace, Evennett, Shayle Gardner, and Colin Ashdown gave what it is usual to call satisfactory accounts of Froth, Elbow, Abhorson, and Barnardine. Claudio, entrusted to Mr. Duncan Yarrow, lacked youthfulness and charm. He should be just from school if he is to win our sympathy ; and to play him carefully and conscientiously is not enough. The Escalus of Mr. Cecil Brooking was good, though hardly attaining to the high dignity which Alfred Brydone used to impose on that part.

Miss Grizelda Hervey played the very difficult and exacting *rôle* of Isabella with considerable skill. She rose finely to the denunciation of Angelo, but was less good in her rounding upon Claudio. The rounding was there, but her previous tenderness to her brother made it improbable. Perhaps there is only one actress in England who would not fall between these two

stools, and that is Miss Thorndike. The hardness which does not go with Imogen, and the implication of moral grandeur which was so sovereignly suited to Beatrice in *The Cenci*, would be inestimable here. Isabella is not a person but an emanation, with thin lips like a mouse trap. Can an emanation have lips? Yes, when Miss Thorndike wills. But Miss Hervey was good in a human, breathing way.

I have left Mr. Ernest Milton's Angelo to the last because I am not really going to deal with it. It was an extremely fine and subtle performance, of great fire and vigour, satisfying to eye, ear and brain. He put into each line some of old Irving's intensity of perception, and collectors of pieces of acting will be glad to have bagged this. The commotion was in the brain, where it ought to be. Let me suggest to the Fellowship of Players that if they can find an Othello their Iago is not far to seek.

April 20.

"Hamlet"

The "Old Vic"

LET me first pay tribute to the way in which Mr Atkins has staged this play and arranged the text. The company takes it all at top speed; the piece is knit together with an unaccustomed coherence, and its beauty and integrity are renewed.

"What of Mr. Ion Swinley?" will at once be asked. Let it be said straight out that his performance belongs to the very highest class—that is, the class which demands the most searching criticism. Comparisons may be odious, but they are also a short cut to appraisement. The obvious question, therefore, must be: "Is Swinley's 'Hamlet' as good as Forbes-Robertson's?"

The answer is, yes and no. The pathos and sweetness of that earlier performance can never again be equalled until Nature re-fashions for us those lineaments and that voice. But grace, nobility, and harmony are not the whole of Hamlet, though these were the only side of him which Robertson turned towards us. There is the secret bosom in which are locked the craven scruple, the sinister itch, and the instinct for decay and death. The floor of this mind has its rotting

boards, and a complete performance must show us these. The perfect Hamlet must exhale fragrance and some hint of the charnel-house. He must be wistful and virile, sensual and ethereal. The strength of Mr. Swinley's performance is that it shows a reasonable holding in all these commodities. He does not melt you as Robertson did, but he has more terror, though this again stops short of the dæmonic. Both halves of Hamlet could be better played ; no actor that I can remember has joined them together so successfully. You could take a German professor to the " Old Vic." and say : " Here is Hamlet."

Mr. Swinley insists upon fundamental sanity. There would never, one thinks, have been any question on this point were it not for that difficult first half of the " Get-thee-to-a-nunnery " scene. This Hamlet does nothing particularly illuminative here ; the point is that he has *already* prepared the mind for the plain fact that, to use a colloquialism, he has " no use " for Ophelia or any honest maid, since passion has abused his mother, and " no time " for her, since his graver mission is yet to do. Shakespeare makes in this place the greatest of all his demands upon actor and audience : Mr. Swinley succeeds because, like a good conjurer, he has accomplished the trick at some earlier period.

This Hamlet is essentially noble, and its perversities are those which may beset a noble spirit. To catalogue its many beauties would take too much space. Yet I must note the extraordinary dignity and grace of movement, the expressive voice, the admirably com-

posed countenance showing, not a habitual spleen, but the cloud of particular grief. Of the big things, the soliloquy—"How all occasions do inform against me"—was done the best. This is a superb speech, and it was done magnificently against the throbbing background of Fortinbras's drum. The play-scene was carried through at a great pitch of tension, and the actor made fine use of the stage, standing on the throne to give out the "stricken deer" verse, and leaping to his friend's throat at: "O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pounds." The excitement did not diminish here, and Mr. Swinley kept passion at white heat right up to the end of the closet scene.

There were a few disappointments. Hamlet gave us plenty of *fioriture* in the way of distemper, but the grace-notes of fancy and affection were sometimes lacking. There is more to be made out of "this most excellent canopy, the air," "this quintessence of dust," and "Is it the King?" The homage to Horatio—"Give me the man that is not passion's slave"—was lacking in tenderness, and, most astonishing of all, the great soliloquy, "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" was perfunctory and ineffective. I implore Mr. Atkins to abolish the unnecessary table before the throne, and to allow Mr. Swinley to thump that royal chair as if it were indeed his stepfather. This is the traditional business, and it cannot be bettered. With the restoration of this speech to full value, this performance will be the most notable of the present generation. And I confess a longing to see it presented

just for once with pomp and circumstance, banners and processions, in the good old Lyceum way. All that Mr. Swinley now lacks to come into his own in the West End is a publicity agent and a producer with not less than Mr. Atkins's good taste.

The Queen of Miss Florence Saunders was satisfying, but I did not greatly care for the King of Mr Wilfrid Walter. He was made up to look too much like Anton Lang in the Passion Play at Oberammergau. Does Ophelia belong to the order of vertebrates? Miss Jane Bacon's heroine seemed altogether spineless. Mr. Hay Petrie turned some planks and a hole into a Warwickshire countryside. Has ever actor presented more perfect distillation of human charity?

May 18.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream"

THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE

It is not easy to discover from what cause the acrimony of a scholiast can naturally proceed. . . . The different readings of copies, and different interpretations of a passage seem to be questions that might exercise the wit without engaging the passions.—SAMUEL JOHNSON.

AS of a single passage, so, too, of a whole play. There is nothing in this very handsome execution of a most intricate job to beget either acrimony or temper. Think of the difficulties! To begin with, there is the play itself—a tripartite affair of romantics, gossamer, and clowning, all pulling against one another like the players at cut-throat bridge. Or you might say that the broadest humours to which Shakespeare ever descended—or ascended—are embedded and enjellied, like the lark and leveret in Tennyson's pie, in the richest of his verse. The first thing for any producer of *The Dream* to aim at is a kind of unity. Nothing is feasible in this play, but at least the three infeasible sections must synchronise in time, and, if one may say so, in space also. It is a great triumph on Mr. Dean's part to have made the play into one story

rather than into three. Theseus, Oberon, and Quince's Amateur Dramatic Society all meet in the same wood and in the same century—impossible in each case, but of the same kind of impossibility.

Then think of the size of the theatre. Some recent editors of the play would have it presented as taking place within a large Elizabethan hall with a huge staircase, beneath which is a cavity with sliding doors. These, being opened, are to reveal a secondary stage, for the use of the fairies. At the end, when the bridal couples are gone up the great staircase, Puck and his friends are to swarm down the balusters into the now darkened hall, reciting in hushed voices :

> Though the house give glimmering light,
> By the dead and drowsy fire . . .

The play was probably done like this in 1598. It is an enchanting idea, but one demanding a small theatre. At Drury Lane there can be little intimacy, and Mr. Dean certainly did the right thing in going in for a "slap-up" production, even at the risk of flamboyance. Up to the end of the first part all went well. The dream-sense was preserved, and if Puck had asked if we believed in fairies we should undoubtedly have clapped our hands. But the second part was less successful. We began to think that M. Fokine's exquisite ballets were perhaps not devised in the same age as Mendelssohn's perfect music. There was a slight jarring of notes here, and then the scenery took a definitely plain turn. After all, Shakespeare insists upon his wood, and the mossy carpet was

obviously rock. Warwickshire seemed very definitely to have yielded to Provence, and that part of Provence, all stunted trees and scrub, in which is Daudet's Windmill. The Palace of Theseus, in the third part, was a garish affair, like Alma Tadema at his best—or worst ; and one would not have been altogether surprised to see Cinderella and her Prince with the Brothers This and That descending the stairs to claim their deserts.

Yet there are many enchanting things in this production. The fairies are always there, peeping at you out of crannies, or with their chins resting on the level of the rocks. One, who is butterfly, will flutter to a tree and hang there motionless. The ballets are finely invented and carried out, though if the piece, which runs some three and three-quarter hours, is to be cut, it is on the dances that this operation should be performed. And possibly the curtain might go up at once on the second and third parts. The *entr'actes* show Mendelssohn in a mood something penitential.

The outstanding performance in a great cast was Mr. Hay Petrie's Puck. This was the actor's first triumph in the West End, and must surely have set the seal on the great reputation he has made at the "Old Vic." This shaggy sprite of Mr. Petrie's—half satyr and half elf—dominated the tale, as indeed he should, so much so that a Frenchman might now take the piece to Paris and produce it there under the title of *La Soirée d'un Faune.* And a faun wholly mischievous and wholly kindly, yet with a hidden store of philosophy laid up for the winter. Mr. Robert Harris

gave the lines of Oberon their full music, and the Titania of Miss Ffrangçon-Davies was an enchantment both to eye and ear. She looked most amazingly like the early portraits of Queen Victoria. The lovers' quartet was of super-excellence. The Hermia of Miss Athene Seyler was a little Tartar of delicate perceptions, while Miss Edith Evans gave to Helena five-foot-ten, or thereabouts, of clucking, hen-witted gaby floundering for a shoulder upon which to lay her distracted head. This was a richly comic performance. Lysander and Demetrius are perhaps not more dissimilar than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but as two handsome peas in a pod Messrs. Leon Quartermaine and Frank Vosper were all that could be desired. Messrs. Allan Jeayes and Brember Wills—stars of the first magnitude in any sky—did all that was possible with Theseus and Egeus.

But in comparison with the fairies and the clowns the romantics in this play are a poor lot. Mr. Cellier's Quince was too recently described in these columns to need recapitulating. It is the same masterly shell of a man as before. Messrs. Clifford Mollison, Miles Malleson, Alfred Clark and H. O. Nicholson make up as rich a company of mechanicals as you shall find on the stage, or in the study by the fireside. Remains the Bottom of Mr. Wilfrid Walter, and of this I think I must say that it is as good a performance as any actor, who has no positive genius for the unctuous, could encompass. Humour is superimposed upon Mr. Walter's personality; it does not ooze through the

actor like butter through a keg. And I imagine that we were not given all that lies behind the lines : " Not a word of me. All that I will tell you is, that the Duke hath dined." What Bottom means is that his vision is too rare to be imparted to those rude and, since they have had no share in the vision, henceforward and for ever inferior minds. This Bottom did not quite give us the wonder and pathos of his translation. But elsewhere he was excellent. Let me offer Mr. Dean the warmest congratulations on his actors. " I hope here is a play fitted," he may say with Peter Quince.

The reception was most enthusiastic.

December 28.

Chronicle Play

"Saint Joan"

A Chronicle Play by G. BERNARD SHAW

New Theatre

MR. SHAW'S preface to the newly printed version of *Saint Joan* (Constable, 6*s.*) is compact, as all this writer's prefaces are, of awful sanity, incredible erudition, and unbelievable flippancy. There is enough horse-sense in these sixty odd pages to keep the solar system going in that commodity for a twelvemonth. There is enough imaginative and reconstructive stuff about the Middle Ages to suggest that the author's power of divining the past is at least as great as Mr. Wells's capacity to guess the future. The joking is quite first-rate.

Mr. Shaw is at enormous pains to prove that Joan was really one of Mr. Arnold Bennett's heroines born some five hundred years before her time. "She was very capable : a born boss." He makes us believe in the actuality of this Joan, mainly by adducing the wrong reasons. Joan is sane because the modern woman who allows her child to be vaccinated is insane. She is nineteen and healthy-minded because the people who in their old age take to monkey glands are diseased.

We are to believe that she heard voices because people of a later date have been what is known as "Galtonic visualisers"—like, one supposes, the folk who play blindfold chess. And so on, and so forth, at a fascinating length. But one keeps on asking with Mrs. Gamp: Who's a-denijin' of it? Mr. Shaw is even more *méchant* than the little animal of the proverb; he defends himself even when he is not attacked.

And lays about him, too, in the process of defence. The "legal compulsion to take the doctor's prescription, however poisonous, is carried on to an extent that would have horrified the Inquisition and staggered Archbishop Laud." Burning at the stake, breaking on the wheel, drawing and quartering did not inflict on the victims "the misery, degradation, and conscious waste and loss of life suffered in our modern prisons, especially the model ones." The reason people formerly believed that the earth was flat "is because their senses told them so." Their senses told them nothing of the sort. What about boats hull-down on the horizon? But perhaps Mr. Shaw is alluding to the days before boats. The preface is called "a sober essay on the facts," though you might not call it that off-handedly.

The Maid in Literature gives Mr. Shaw his head. Shakespeare's Joan is "as little authentic as the popular English view of the German Crown Prince in 1915 or Lenin in 1917." Voltaire and Schiller are laughed off the page. Mark Twain's heroine "skirted to the ground, and with as many petticoats as Noah's wife in

a toy ark, is an attempt to combine Bayard with Esther Summerson from *Bleak House* into an unimpeachable American school-teacher in armour." If Twain was a street arab, Andrew Lang was a simpleton who, like Walter Scott, "enjoyed mediæval history as a string of Border romances rather than as the record of a high European civilisation based on a catholic faith." Anatole France is "anti-clerical, anti-mystic, and fundamentally unable to believe that there ever was any such person as the real Joan." In other words, Mr. Shaw's Joan must be right because everybody else's has been wrong. One would rather say that the latest Joan is right by virtue of her own truth. The others have nothing to do with the case.

But one would not, in short space, undertake to discuss either comprehensively or in detail this closely packed piece of argument. As a piece of reasoning it is both wayward and flawless ; as a piece of writing it is magnificent. It is all so extraordinarily 'cute. The difficulty now is not the mud which Shakespeare, or some other, threw at Joan, but the dirt which, later and for some hundreds of years, has been allowed to bespatter her judges, and the whitewash with which it became fashionable to coat their victim. This is so obvious that only a big man would have thought of saying it. Shakespeare's kings, Mr. Shaw points out a little later, are not statesmen, and his cardinals have no religion. His world is not governed by forces in the shape of religions and laws, but by vulgarly ambitious individuals who make rows. This is per-

fectly true ; but who else would have thought it noteworthy ?

There follows a good passage showing that essential truth may demand an inexact picture of accidental facts :—

> It is the business of the stage to make its figures more intelligible to themselves than they would be in real life ; for by no other means can they be made intelligible to the audience. Cauchon and Lemaître have to make intelligible not only themselves but the Church and the Inquisition, just as Warwick has to make the feudal system intelligible, the three between them having thus to make a twentieth century audience conscious of an epoch fundamentally different from its own. Obviously, the real Cauchon, Lemaître, and Warwick could not have done this : they were part of the Middle Ages themselves, and therefore as unconscious of its peculiarities as of the atomic formula of the air they breathed. But the play would be unintelligible if I had not endowed them with enough of this consciousness to enable them to explain their attitude to the twentieth century.

Well, they *do* explain it, and the author regrets that he cannot have twelve hours to do it in instead of three and a half. Will Mr. Shaw never realise that the better the stuff the less you must have of it ? The scene in the Cathedral failed with me for the simple reason that my mind was fagged out in the precedent struggle to cope with the aforesaid Church, Inquisition and Feudal System. Your good thing is the one of

which you can most easily have too much. Mr. Shaw defends his epilogue on the ground that it is essential. One would attack it on the ground that it is redundant. To the perceptive it is implicit in all that has gone before. But perhaps all playgoers are not perceptive. Perhaps some of them are like the average jury, to whom counsel must say everything three times over. Once, because the box hears that counsel is speaking but does not distinguish the words. Twice because it distinguishes the words without grasping their meaning. Three times, because, with luck, the jury may at last " get " counsel. Mr. Shaw's epilogue is for those who are hard both of hearing and understanding.

" It is always hard for superior wits to understand the fury roused by their exposures of the stupidities of comparative dullards." To which the correct retort is : " Art thou there, true-penny ? " Cannot Mr. Shaw understand the fury roused in the devout breast on reading that Joan is the most notable Warrior Saint in the Christian Calendar, and the " queerest fish " among the eccentric worthies of the Middle Ages ?

June 29.

The thing to do with a new work by Mr. Shaw—and, indeed, with any new work—is to find out its particular quality of interest, enlightenment, ecstasy, and provocation, to discover the exact kind and degree of emotion which that particular work, and not some

other, contains. The point is to get at an author's meaning, and not to attempt to discover corroboration of your own conceptions. What like is Mr. Shaw's "Joan"? For the moment nobody else's matters. You are not to find yourself aggrieved because her memoralist has not seen fit to bathe his subject in the sentimental mysticism of M. Anatole France, or to make her the central figure of some romantic melodrama, all gilt armour and mellifluence, unfurling her replies to her judges in words silken as the banner of France. Incidentally, if ever you saw Sarah's Maid, half angel and half bird—who, to the charge of being a witch, retorted, "Si je l'étais, je ser-r-r-ais déjà loin!" with a gentleness and ineffability unknown to celestial choir or cooing dove—incidentally, if you remembered this most pathetic impersonation, the thing to do was to forget it and put it out of your consciousness altogether.

You are not, I suggest, to "worrit" because in the play Joan is not really the principal personage, nor yet because the play does not pan out quite as you would have it. Let me admit that it is a trifle disconcerting to see Joan plunged at the rising of the curtain into so very much the middle of things, ordering a noble lord about as though she were one of Mr. Arnold Bennett's "managing" young women. It would have been pleasant and romantic to find Joan tending sheep in her native fields of Domremy, hearing her "voices," and rejecting some loutish suit. It is, to the conservative playgoer, distressing to have no glimpse of the

coronation in Rheims Cathedral—what a " set " they would have made of it in the old Lyceum days !—and to be fobbed off with the less important cloisters, and what for a time looks like mere desultory chatter. But I must not waste space in describing what the play is not, but rather try to make plain what it is.

Saint Joan seems to me—and I stand open to any amount of correction—to be a history of privilege. It is in seven scenes. The first merely sets the play going in so far as it establishes the immaculacy and immunity of the Maid, and provides her with armour, horses, men, and means of access to the Dauphin. The second scene shows her conquest of the Court. Let me say here, since I may not have space later on, that the Dauphin was beautifully played by Mr. Thesiger, who showed beneath his astonishing grotesquerie the pity and pathos of all weakness. It is during this scene that Mr. Shaw strikes one of his very few false notes. Joan is challenged : " You tell us that Saint Catharine and Saint Margaret talk to you every day ? " " They do ! " comes the retort. " Through your imagination ? " they suggest to her, and she replies, " That is the way God talks to us." Now Joan never said that and never believed it. If I am wrong, and if she would have admitted this, then we must deem her to have been five hundred years in advance of her time. Similarly, an Archbishop who defines a miracle as " an event which creates faith," in contradistinction to a supernatural happening which has to be believed whether you like it or not—

such a cleric has read rather more Herbert Spencer than is good for, or probable in, a fifteenth-century divine. The third scene shows a miracle—the change of wind—happening before Joan prays for it, which seems to indicate that Mr. Shaw would have belief follow in the wake of reason. But I would not be dogmatic here. Throughout the play the author is at his old trick of what in music I think they call "overtones." Simpler, perhaps, to say that he runs two hares at once, and that the value which accrues when old speeches are informed with present-day meaning must obviously be at some cost of authenticity.

The real play begins with the fourth scene, in which the Bishop of Beauvais, the Earl of Warwick, and Chaplain de Stogumber assemble round a table and "get down to it." The English peer wants Joan burned, not so much because her continued prestige is a danger to English arms, but because, by going direct to the Dauphin and not through the intermediacy of the Court, she has struck at the very existence, and reason for being, of the peerage. The Bishop wants Joan burned because she pretends to the ear of God by ways other than through his Ministers. This scene is enormously long ; we lose sight of Joan ; and there is danger, as the trio review the whole field of religion and politics from 1429 to the present day, and we sit and hope in vain that each fresh turn in the argument will be the last—there is danger, I repeat, of both physical and intellectual cramp. Will Mr. Shaw never learn to distinguish between length and significance ?

Cut this scene in two and you double its meaning; quarter it and you quadruple its effect. One was so weary of the flood of talk that the ensuing colloquy in the Cathedral hardly got the attention it deserved. There was great pathos in the repeated warnings of Archbishop, General, and King that not one prayer, man, or louis would be expended on Joan's salvation, should she fall into enemy hands. Joan had her second opportunity here, and her passage comparing the loneliness of the human soul with the loneliness of God was immensely fine.

After the much-needed interval came the Trial scene in the Hall at Rouen. In an Author's Note on the programme, Mr. Shaw states that Joan's confessions, recantation, relapse, and execution, which actually occupied several days, on the stage occupy forty minutes. This is inaccurate. The scene lasts forty minutes, but for the first half of it Joan is still in her cell, and the time is taken up with an exhaustive and exhausting disquisition on heresy. It may be true that all evil begins in good, but the lecture, or so much of it, held up the action and ultimately became a weariness. However good the cackle—and it *was* good—one was conscious of a growing impatience for the 'osses. The trial and all that followed was masterly. When Warwick entered, called for attendants, and received no answer, the silence betokening that all that little world had gone to the burning, you realised that the theatre was being put to its proper purpose. And this was reinforced when Stogumber rushed in with the

horror of the accomplished martyrdom written on his face, its terror quaking in his voice, his whole soul shaking with the sudden realisation of cruelty. There was another sermon here—one-tenth the length of the others and ten times more effective.

The play then draws rapidly to what ought to be its close. Warwick ascertains from the executioner that not a nail, not a hair, not a vestige which might become a relic remains. The legend of Joan is destroyed. But the priest who held the Cross before her dying eyes avows that it has just begun. "I wonder!" says the English murderer as the curtain falls. This should have been the end. There is a faintly jovial, quasi-satirical, and wholly unnecessary epilogue, conceived in a vein of lesser exaltation. Mr. Shaw excuses this on the ground that without it the play would be "only a sensational tale of a girl who was burnt." Do not believe it; Mr. Shaw does himself injustice here. There is not an ounce of sensation anywhere in his piece, and the epilogue is implicit in all that has gone before. It is the greatest compliment to this play to say that at its tragic climax every eye was dry, so overwhelmingly had its philosophic import mastered sentiment. None in the audience would have saved Joan, even if he could.

The production was beyond any praise of mine. The scenery, designed by Mr. Charles Ricketts, was neither frankly representational nor uncompromisingly expressionistic, but a happy blend of the two. The dresses made a kind of music in the air, and at the end

Joan was allowed to stand for a moment in all that ecstasy of tinsel and blue in which French image-makers enshrine her memory. As Joan Miss Thorndike had three admirable moments : when she said " They do ! ", when she listened in the Ambulatory to the pronouncement of desertion to come, and when she listened to the reading of her recantation. May I beseech Mr. Shaw to allow her to drop the dialect ? Whatever the quality of Lorraine peasant-speech, it cannot have been Lancashire, and there was too much the smack of Oldham about such sentences as " Ah call that muck ! " and " Th'art not King yet, lad ; th'art nobbut t'Dauphin ! " Apart from these eccentricities, which were not of the actress's seeking, Joan was excellent—boyish, brusque, inspired, exalted, mannerless, tactless, and obviously, once she had served her turn, a nuisance to everybody. The part is one which no actress who is leading lady only and not artist would look at. But Miss Thorndike is a noble artist, and did nobly.

It is in keeping with the spirit of the play that the character which remains most with me is not Joan. Since Thursday I find myself thinking continually of Mr. Lyall Swete's Warwick, who was the materialistic fox of the Middle Ages come to life, and of Mr. O. B. Clarence's Inquisitor, about whose silver serenity there was real awe, and whose long speech was a very notable performance. Mr. Casson, in his outburst on cruelty, gave one more proof of those talents as to which he is altogether too modest ; and there should

be good words for Messrs. Robert Horton, Eugene Leahy, Lawrence Anderson (very sincere and moving as Joan's comforter), Victor Lewisohn, Milton Rosmer, Bruce Winston, Raymond Massey, and Shayle Gardner.

March 30.

Restoration Drama

"The Way of the World"

By WILLIAM CONGREVE

Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith

CHARLES LAMB did a world of mischief when he put before his most famous essay the title *On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century*. Sitting at this performance of the greatest prose comedy in the English language, I could not, for the life of me, see anything artificial in the personages beyond their inessentials—dress, speech, and polite notions. Manners change, but not the man who wears them. If Lady Wishfort is artificial, then so, too, is Falstaff. I see equally little reason why Congreve's hot-handed widow should be so superfluous to demand the time of day, except for the causes assigned to that other gormandiser. Wishfort is all appetite, and as real as any canvas of old Hogarth or modern page of Zola. One of her kind attends dinner parties to this day, less her candour and wit.

Millamant, too, could go into any novel of Meredith, *mutatis mutandis*, and having regard to the topics which a more generous age has conceded to "the sex." Wit of Millamant's order is imperishable, for the simple

reason that her creator gave her a mind. Lamb's celebrated excuse for compunctionless laughter is that these creatures never were. The truth is that they are, and always will be. "The effect of Congreve's plays," says Hazlitt, "is prodigious *on the well-informed spectator*." It is easy to pronounce as artificial a world of which you are ignorant; in the Hebrides *Our Betters* would doubtless be dubbed fantastic. There are more Wishforts and Millamants about town to-day than there are Hedda Gablers. Mirabell is a *poseur*, but he does not date one-tenth as much as Wilde's Lord Henry Wotton. And as for Sir Wilfull Witwould, one of his kidney sold me a horse no later than Wednesday last. Congreve, in a word, was the natural well from which Sheridan, Wilde, and our own Somerset Maugham have drawn their "natural table-waters." Without, alas, quite so much naturalness.

How is the piece played at Hammersmith? For all it is worth, is the answer; and perhaps just a teeny-weeny bit popularised. We could do without that business with the chandelier and the bewigged orchestra. The play is keyed up to the highest pitch known to classic comedy. It may be that Mr. Playfair was afraid to trust us with the pure distillation of the Comic Spirit; it is much more probable that he recognised that in Miss Margaret Yarde he had a Wishfort who must prove a moral and physical eruption in—to use Prince Hal's phrase—flame-coloured taffeta. It was a first-class performance, striking alike to eye and ear. The simpering of this hag-ridden beldam would have

brought down the commendations of a Lear. There was cut-and-come-again, you felt, in the way of grotesque, unbridled fancy. Sobriety could not hold the stage against this monstrously comic obsession. And therefore was sobriety not attempted.

But what of Millamant? Almost everything, is our answer this time. Never can actress have spoken the epilogue with less belief in its aptness.

> There are some critics so with spleen diseased,
> They scarcely come inclining to be pleased.

was not true of those who on Thursday came to see, not only the old piece, but the speaker of the epilogue fulfil prophecy. Let me not mince matters. Miss Edith Evans is the most accomplished of living and practising English actresses. Leaving tragedy to Miss Thorndike, she has a wider range than any other artist before the public, and is unrivalled alike in sentimental and adamantine comedy. A year or two ago there were seen at intervals upon the London stage elderly spinsters with white hair purring the fire out in vacuity. These tabbies were all Miss Evans. Her *dévote* in *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* and her housemaid in *I Serve* showed a quality of pathos which, one thought, had left the scene with Mrs. Kendal. This actress's Cleopatra in *All for Love* might, though tragedy is not her *forte*, have hung without discrepancy among the Lelys at Hampton Court. Her performances in *Heartbreak House* and *Back to Methuselah* are too glitteringly new to need recalling. Her Mistress Page was the quintessence of gaiety.

I am tired of recounting all this, but the thing has got to be persisted in. Miss Evans has simply to be dinned into the most insensitive of auricular appendages—the ear of the West End manager. They say that, by the tape-measure, this actress has not the fashionable type of feature, for all the world as though her business was to grin before a camera. Bluntly and frankly, I will agree that if I wanted to hire a chit to carry a banner in a pantomime I should not engage this artist. But if she does not possess rare beauty in the highest sense, then I know not that quality. This countenance is replete, as was said of Congreve's style, "with sense and satire, conveyed in the most pointed and polished terms." This acting is "a shower of brilliant conceits, a new triumph of wit, *a new conquest over dullness.*" You could hang any one of this player's portraits on the sky, and challenge the Zodiac.

And why?

Her Millamant is impertinent without being pert, graceless without being ill-graced. She has only two scenes, but what scenes they are of unending subtlety and finesse! Never can that astonishing "Ah! idle creature, get up when you will" have taken on greater delicacy, nor "I may by degrees *dwindle* into a wife" a more delicious mockery. "*Adieu*, my morning thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye *douceurs*, ye *sommeils du matin*, *adieu*"—all this was breathed out as though it were early Ronsard or du Bellay. And "I nauseate walking," and "Natural, easy Suckling!" bespoke the very genius of humour.

There is a pout of the lips, a jutting forward of the chin to greet the conceit, and a smile of happy deliverance when it is uttered, which defy the chronicler. This face, at such moments, is like a city in illumination, and when it is withdrawn leaves a glow behind.

One fault I find, and one only. Millamant's first entry bears out Mirabell's announcement: "Here she comes, i'faith, full sail, with her fan spread and her streamers out." The actress made her appearance something lapwing fashion, a trifle too close to the ground. It is possible, too, that Mrs. Abington gave the whole character a bigger sweep. Miss Evans conceived her as a rogue in porcelain, and kept her within that conception. Walpole, one feels sure, would have had civil things to say of this performance, of which the perfect enunciation is one of the minor marvels.

The Mirabell of Mr. Robert Loraine was a trifle on the sober side, but showed distinction if a trifle too much heart. The part was beautifully spoken, and the actor used only the suavest and most gentle notes in his voice. He listened exquisitely. Miss Dorothy Green made great music of her lines, and Messrs. Playfair and Norman enjoyed themselves hugely.

No playgoer can afford to miss this revival. It is worth a guinea to stand in the pit, though I believe Mr. Playfair's charges are more moderate.

February 10.

"The Country Wife"

By WILLIAM WYCHERLEY

The Phœnix Society

THIS is the play to have kept old Polonius awake. Few writers have been more studious of grossness in thought and expression than its author. Conduct is notoriously three parts of life ; misconduct is the whole of this outspoken comedy, which, until this week, had not been performed for nearly two hundred years. The characteristics of Wycherley are not in dispute ; the point is whether we are to range ourselves with the censors or against them.

Considering first the dramatist's friends, we remember that Lamb took out a special licence legalising the monstrous quality of this entertainment—the pretence that it was all a fairy tale happening in a land innocent of right and wrong. But that was only Charles's way, and I have never been able to believe that he was really sincere in all that pleading for an airing beyond the diocese of the strict conscience. Lamb consented that Wycherley should divide the world into betrayers and betrayed with the same light-heartedness with which later critics permitted the creator of *Iolanthe* to

apportion it between Liberals and Conservatives. But whereas politics may provide excellent fun, marriage is no joke, not even a poor one. To treat the sanctity of the hearth flippantly is to make enemies in both camps—among the serious-minded, who raise the moral question, and among the lax, who say that where morality is not regarded immorality loses all its savour.

On the whole, one takes Lamb's defence to be thoroughly unsound. Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt were better champions, since they boggled at nothing and enjoyed their author straightforwardly and for all he was worth, which, after all, was the manlier way. There is something un-English about sneaking regard, and this, if you take away the fine writing, is all that Elia's essay amounts to.

Macaulay, of course, is the Big Noise among Wycherley's enemies. He rails against the man's immunity from criticism, and declares him safe since he is " too filthy to handle and too noisome even to approach." But perhaps we need not bother our heads too much about a critic who could deem Boswell a fool. When Macaulay, discussing Wycherley's old age, says that he can conceive nothing more miserable than the figure made by " this ribald old man " among those rising poets, Addison, Philips, and Rowe, we realise that he is talking the purest and earliest Victorian nonsense. A later Victorian was still echoing Macaulay when he described Wycherley's dialogue as possessing the " miasmatic radiance of a foul ditch shimmering in the sun." Yet not even the bitterest

detractors of the playwright have been able to deny him the possession of talents of a brilliant order. Even Macaulay concedes ingenuity, observation, and patience in the work of polishing.

What about the dramatist himself? There can be little doubt, I think, that he posed as a satirist and reformer of manners. All that we know of Wycherley points to his having been a man almost grotesquely covetous of literary fame. He had no feeling for poetry and was a versifier of mean calibre. He was devoid of sentiment. From the expression of his countenance, "suggestive of a poet who had married a dowager countess and awakened to the situation," we divine that he snatched at the mantle of the satirist, and used it to cover his relish for the low. It was in this garb alone that he could hope to capture the town.

The Phœnix Society's performance, following upon the heels of the Congreve revival, brought up these old judgments for fresh examination. Let us agree that Wycherley's wit is to Congreve's as a taper to the sun. This is not to say that this quality was not in the older writer. Lady Fidget's rebuke after Mrs. Dainty has gone just a shade too far—"Fy, fy, fy, for shame, sister! whither shall we ramble?"—is, on the stage, and given the context, as witty as anything in Congreve. That master has the air of a seigneur who has dropped a diamond in a rubbish heap, and would recover it at the point of his cane. Whereas Wycherley is one with his rubbishy world. He enjoys the rough-and-tumble, and is at home in it. He has ten times Congreve's

gusto, though he lacks his good taste, and owns a superiority in vigour, naturalness, and the art of telling a story which make up, or very nearly, for the inferiority in style. Strip Millamant of her satins and laces and she ceases to exist; reduce Mrs. Pinchwife to her native woollens, and she is unchanged. There is nothing in *The Way of the World* to equal the letter-writing scene in fun, plausibility, and theatrical effectiveness.

Wycherley's coarseness of language is neither here nor there—even Macaulay was not troubled about a matter of fashion. But the coarseness of mind is more difficult to overlook. There is hardly any pretence that the satirist does not enjoy the state of things satirised; indeed, it is obvious that he revels in it. Congreve saved our faces with some polite action as to passion; there is none in Wycherley, whose characters are given up to uncontrolled appetite. No moral laws are broken in this play, not because it takes place in fairyland, but because its author has no conception of morality. His domain is the slope leading to chaos in which even the polite world must perish. Yet one has to be extraordinarily careful in bringing accusations of a wilful attempt to debase the public mind. We remember what happened to Flaubert, and what stupid people thought and said of Ibsen. The same charges which have always been brought against Wycherley were levelled at Choderlos de Laclos, who, one hundred years later, in *Les Liaisons Dangeureuses*, drew an equally candid and unflattering portrait of

French society. "A barrack room Satyricon!" said Nodier of the book of which Baudelaire was to declare that if it burned, it burned with the fire of ice. Yet this can never be Wycherley's quality, and one will boldly continue to deny him any moral impulse, and say rather that his talent lay in lighting a bonfire in St. James's Park. At this he warmed his hands, rejoicing in the glare which it cast upon the fashionable promenaders.

There are people who divine a thesis behind this comedy—that if husbands were not tyrants wives would not be faithless—who suggest that the piece is a forerunner of *A Doll's House*. Do not believe it. The thing is a guffaw, and a rude one. If virtue is not made a mock of in this play, care is taken that the virtuous people shall all be fools; the rogues are rated according to their success in roguery, and the fops blamed because they have not wit enough to be knaves. To sum up, we may pardon the verbal grossness of Wycherley, but not his ethics, or the lack of them. The framework and the subject of his picture are unpardonable, yet we cannot deny that the brush was that of a master.

Mr. Baliol Holloway once more proved how good an actor he is when he has an author and a part to stand up to. Horner's machinations make up a muddy sea, to be ridden boldly or not at all, and the actor ploughed through them with a will, and in the grand manner. We shall never know how Quin came to do such wonders with Pinchwife, unless we conceive

him to have played it as Mr. Cellier and Mr. Randle Ayrton play Ford. The part proved an uphill one for Mr. Howard Rose. Possibly Mr. Stanley Lathbury did not get the full measure of humour out of Sir Jaspar Fidget. Something richer seemed indicated, since the comicality of unfaithfulness must lie, not in the deceiver, but in the deceived. Contrariwise, Mr. Thesiger got more meaning out of Sparkish than there was there. Miss Athene Seyler dealt adequately with Pritchard's great *rôle* of Lady Fidget. But the feat of the evening was the Margery Pinchwife of Miss Isabel Jeans. This character has been exploited by all the great comic actresses of the past—Mrs. Knep, Kitty Clive, Mrs. Pritchard, and, in the version called *The Country Girl*, by Mrs. Jordan, whose immediate success in it raised her weekly salary from four pounds to eight, and then twelve. But I find it hard to think that any of them can have bettered Miss Jeans, who got absolutely into Margery's skin, or have improved upon that look which stole into her face when she first glimpsed the possibilities of lying. I have not seen sufficient of this actress to make any definite estimate of her capabilities. It may be that as Lady Macbeth she would say, "Give me the daggers, sweet bud," with the same air of roguish innocence. But, even so, I vow I should be enraptured.

February 24.

Foreign Plays and Adaptations

"La Dame aux Camélias" and "Le Demi-Monde"

By ALEXANDRE DUMAS *FILS*

New Oxford Theatre

OF Mlle. Cécile Sorel's achievements in Molière it is, at this time of day, unnecessary to speak. She is the exponent *par excellence* of the grand manner in comedy. Nobody can approach her in this kind, and she has the best tradition of the Comédie-Française by heart. Homage being duly paid to the big master, I propose to pass on to the consideration of a little one.

It is easy to sneer at the drama of Dumas *fils*, to dub it old fashioned, to pretend that it is the mummy case to an embalmed style of acting. Perhaps it is. The point to remember is that some mummies are more interesting than some living people. The younger Dumas was very much alive in his day. It is true that he took himself too seriously as a moralist, but he is not the only playwright who has fallen into that error. Is not the elaborate passage in which Olivier de Jalin compares the *demi-mondaine* to the imperfect peach

the parent of all Sir Arthur Pinero's metaphorical excursions? As a moralist Dumas was negligible from the beginning. It is curious that this "advanced thinker" should still be agitating himself about the rights of husbands to strangle peccant wives and kill lovers out of hand within ten years or so of the rising of that stiff northerly breeze which, in *A Doll's House*, was to sweep all that nonsense away.

But high seriousness is one thing and good play-writing is another, and it may be doubted whether, on the plane of entertainment pure and simple, the Frenchman has ever been surpassed. Dumas had an eye like Pinero's to threaten and command a theatrical situation. His characters, whom he mistook for mouthpieces, came to life, apparently of their own accord. His dialogue is taut and spare, and if he allows himself a superfluous sentence it is because that sentence is a witty one. "Il y avait beaucoup de monde aux Champs-Elysées?" asks Marguerite in the course of her tiff with Armand. "Beaucoup." "Ah," she replies, "*Tant mieux!*" The audience will always break into a laugh at Olivier's "Mon cher, on n'épouse pas Madame D'Ange. Il faut arriver de l'Afrique pour avoir cette idée là." The wit is not always on the surface. De Nanjac hears that another character has visited Africa. He is delighted and says, "Vous connaissez donc ce beau pays *dont on dit tant de mal?*" Wilde has not bettered this.

Let me confess to finding unending enjoyment in the least word and tiniest action of these old plays.

They bring back those amusing early days of the Second Empire, when *Madame Bovary* was a new book and the dandies wore tight-fitting grey trousers and maroon-coloured coats, with frilling at the wrists. I delight equally in that piece of sewing which Nanine has not finished after three-quarters of a century, and in preposterous old Duval, stiff as a drawing by Leech, and as insistent as the elder of the Brothers Griffiths upon the symbolism of that top hat which he removes only upon the disclosure of the courtesan's " noble sentiments." This world of Dumas's imagining is a seemly one, and " noble " is the word which best describes the decorum of the things which happen in it. " Honour " is in everybody's mouth, duels are forever in the air, and menials exist only to bring in opportune visitors and carry out indiscreet orders. There is no nonsense suggesting that servants are human beings. Human beings, in Dumas's eyes, are people with a minimum *cent mille francs de rente ;* the frailer half of the lower orders, not being content to remain in their proper station, rise by improper means to a third act of guilty splendour, and die in the fifth of phthisis on a Louis Quinze sofa. It may not be Ibsen, but it is very good. Y avait-il beaucoup de monde au théâtre ? Beaucoup. Tant mieux !

Mlle. Sorel's Marguerite owes nothing to its predecessors. It is not in the least like Bernhardt's, and is not meant to be. Indeed, the actress is rather inclined to overdo the avoidance of similarity. It is for this reason, probably, that she shortens the letter-

writing scene, and glides quickly over cadences—I had almost written cadenzas—too well known. This Marguerite is, however, too imposing ; none of her lovers, who must have found their situation ridiculous, would have dared to call her "bonne fille." Mlle. Sorel had a great moment when she touzled and mouzled Armand at the words : "Ce n'est pas possible que Dieu soit si bon !" But what competent actress could fail here ?

And Sorel is supremely competent. Her technique is irreproachable ; she never misplaces a finger, and she is a mistress of silences. Armed cap-à-pie with every device that brain can suggest and long study accomplish, she has everything except the one thing which makes all the rest worth while. Her gestures are superb, her subtlety of facial expression is astonishing, her very slippers act. When she takes the stage you think of some majestic galleon *prenant le large* and laden to the brim with treasure. Or of some great dancer speaking with her body alone. And then the way she wears her clothes ! These are of unexampled magnificence and rare beauty—two things which do not always go together. Sorel emerges from them as certain ivory statuettes grow out of their bronze sheaths. I repeat that nothing which art, calculation and contrivance can do has been omitted. Yet she never moves me for a second. I sit and admire and note that nothing could be more adroit. And I think of a line which is written on the camera obscura at Southend—

" *La Dame aux Camélias*," " *Le Demi-Monde* "

> Large ships on the crumpled green
> Sailing so grand.

This actress is *too* grand. One remembers the gesture almost of *naïveté* with which Sarah used to offer Armand the flower. Sorel finds for this the movement of a statesman laying a wreath at the foot of a cenotaph.

If Sorel showed but an ounce of heart she would rank with the greatest. Her poise alone suggests the figure-head on a battleship. In a heartless part, like that of Suzanne D'Ange, she is superb. We may at times be reminded of what the old critic said of Kemble —that he had the abstracted air and suspended chin of a man about to sneeze—and fear lest this calamity be about to befall Cécile. But the danger passes and the performance remains flawless. That the year 1855 knew no creature so gorgeous does not matter. Suzanne harks back to Choderlos de Laclos's Marquise de Merteuil, and perhaps we cannot ask of Nature that she should provide a Valmont also.

But the artist was excellently supported by MM. Boyer, Sellier, and de Saxe.

June 1.

"The Seven Who Were Hanged"

A Play by LEONID ANDREYEV

The Yiddish Art Theatre

SOMETIMES one feels that praise may be taken a trifle perfunctorily. It is not an uncommon experience for a critic to find himself slapped on the back and challenged: "Of course I saw what you wrote about such and such a play. Now, tell me, what is it really like?" I want readers of the *Sunday Times* to take me at my word when I say deliberately, and weighing every syllable, that the performance of *The Seven Who Were Hanged* by these Yiddish players contains more great acting than I have ever seen on any stage in any one piece. The drama, in itself, is a great emotional and spiritual experience. One of the tests of a masterpiece is the inability to shake off experience; since Monday evening last I have spent my waking hours in Russia, in prison with these pitiful wretches. But I ask even more than that readers should take me at my word. I ask that they shall go and judge for themselves. The piece will be

played again, on Thursday evening in this week, and it is the duty of every person who takes an intelligent interest in the theatre to witness this extraordinarily fine play with its magnificent presentation. A complete ignorance of the language need not be a deterrent ; the programme contains an elaborate synopsis, and the scope of the play puts it above words.

I shall beg leave to give the barest account of what it is all about. A Cabinet Minister is told by the Chief of Police that the authorities have discovered a plot to assassinate him next morning, that His Excellency is in no danger as the conspirators are known and will be arrested in front of his house before the bomb is thrown. In spite of this assurance the Minister is so terrified at the idea of death that he dies of apoplexy. The next act shows us the trial and sentencing of the five anarchists, to whom are joined a half-witted, subnormal vagrant and a brigand. The third act shows them all in prison, the fourth depicts their behaviour on the train that is to take them to the place of execution. The last act gives the procession on the way to the scaffold.

Told thus, the play must read like an old-time broad-sheet, or an excerpt from a modern newspaper report. You would hardly believe that it can be compact of love and fellowship, spiritual kinship and ecstasy. Yet so it is, and so, to judge by their literature, it must always be with this race which thinks so differently from our own. Russia is a queer, big place, where queer, big things happen ; and Russian facts

are stubborn in this, that they persist in being less facts than indices. Take the Cabinet Minister, for example : at the beginning a figure of farce as the elder Guitry might conceive farce, scenting his waistcoat, hands, and the tufts of hair surrounding his little pig-like ears, then changing to a figment of Grand Guignol with his horrible, stertorous death-agonies. Yet behind this comic monstrosity generation after generation of oppressors loom.

In the police court our sympathies are not maudlinly invoked. We deplore the crime, and are not invited to side with Anarchy. We feel pity, not for the individual prisoners, but for that spirit which would not hurt a fly yet knows no ruth in the cause of revolution. When the five learn that their request—to be hanged together—is granted, their tribulation turns to ineffable joy, and with faces transfigured and shining they chant the revolutionary's creed. The leave-taking scene in the prison has a purely human quality of pathos, and as it is played at the Scala is almost beyond bearing. I do not imagine that a single eye can have remained dry throughout this act. The scene in the train is an essay in brotherhood.

But it is in the last act that the theatre is used at its best. It could be sensational, harrowing, " effective " in the commonplace way. It is, however, none of these, but draws the piece to a grave liturgical close. It remains in the mind like music. It is difficult for me to say anything about the acting, for the simple reason that it did not seem to be acting at all. There

was no flamboyance. But not Duse could have launched you upon seas of diviner pity, nor Bernhardt have moved you to a greater quickening of the spirit. There are eighteen actors in this piece, and it is impossible to make distinctions.

But if I must call special attention to any individual performances it would be to that of the Cabinet Minister, Mr. Isidor Cachier, who is to be compared with Lucien Guitry and none other, and to the father, mother, and son of Muni Weizenfreund, Anna Appel, and Alex Tenenholtz. The second of the five Anarchists, a young actress whom I cannot identify, is also extraordinarily good. But in fairness I ought to name the whole cast. The scenery varies from the perfectly dreadful—the set for the first act could not be worse, no horse ever foaled having such forelegs as the charger in the huge picture—through the formal and expressionistic to a realistic snowstorm of great beauty seen through the tracery of bare boughs. The fainting soldier is a remarkable *coup de théâtre* which one will never forget.

But, then, I do not propose ever to forget anything which happens in this play. It is not like the theatre. If on leaving the Scala you had asked me what the piece had been like I could not have told you. If you had desired to know how I had fared in Russia I should have made shift to reply. I implore, nay, I challenge the Stage Society to give *The Seven Who Were Hanged* in English.

May 18.

"A Magdalen's Husband"

ADAPTED FROM THE NOVEL OF VINCENT BROWN
BY MILTON ROSMER AND EDWARD PERCY

THE PLAYBOX THEATRE

A MAGDALEN'S HUSBAND is in every way the best piece yet produced by the Playbox. It is "strong," and deals not only in psychological interest of an unusual kind but also in incidents of cumulative terror and increasing pity. It is exactly the kind of thing the Playbox ought to produce. It is real highbrow, and not the imitation stuff written by the possessors of grey suede shoes and an address in Chelsea. It is, in fact, so genuinely highbrow that a navvy in the gallery, watching the gradual and unescapable unfolding of the drama, must have been moved to tears.

I am not going to pretend that this piece is realistic. It isn't. It is true to its author's vision of life, to his characters as he broods over them and interprets what, in real life, they may be thinking but will never say. No peasant woman will ever come out with a high-faluting "We women don't like to be beguiled of our tears." Peace-makers in village brawls do not exclaim,

"No violence! we must trust in God!" What would actually be said is, "Don't bash 'im, Bill!" with embroideries according to the talent of the speaker. I am not sure, even, that these villagers would consciously think the things for which, in this play, the author and his adapters lend them utterance. Hedgers and ditchers are not consciously introspective.

In real life these humble tragedies are not matters of check and counter-check, warnings and fendings-off. The volcano does not rumble before the event. Pigs are bought and cows sold; there is drinking, and a man is a murderer at midnight who thought no wrong at noon. The tragedy is inexplicable, because there is not an artist on hand to explain it. Probably a court of law would have found little difficulty in explaining the murder of Martin Potten by Zeekel Draicott. Nothing is easier than to devise explanations which, fitting the facts perfectly, are yet not the truth. In this piece the adapters explain the tragedy as it unfolds. And since in a play the instruments of explanation are necessarily the characters themselves, it follows that this murderer, his victim, and the woman on whose behalf the crime is committed must not only say things which in real life would never come to their lips, but possess and reveal thoughts of which actually, until the moment of action, they might be utterly unconscious. Mr. Brown, in his novel, presumably did more than "report" this tragedy; Messrs. Rosmer and Percy have presented it very well indeed.

The adapters have not shrunk from asking the spectator to use his brains and his imagination. Joan is a girl of the class of Mr. Hardy's Tess. She is betrayed by one Jim Anscombe, a furtive little rat in human shape, and takes to the town. She is reclaimed, and the one weakness of the piece is the absence of any reason for this reclamation. It is simply postulated. Martin Potten, a savage, marries her out of sheer selfish desire. Joan does not love Martin, but she does love Zeekel Draicott, though remaining true to her husband. Martin is ravaged by two contending passions—normal jealousy of Joan's former lovers and insane anger that the woman whom he dragged out of the mire should have risen to a blamelessness which, in his view of it, amounts to superciliousness. This anger is the key to the whole tragedy. Joan has become too good for him, and "Saint" is his persistent, envenomed reproach. This inferior soul is revolted by nothing which shall drag the woman down to its own level.

The thought here is dark, and will not easily win consent from people who lead sheltered lives. Jim Anscombe returns to the village, and Martin decides that Joan shall "forgive" her betrayer, whom he brings home from a drunken frolic. He will force Joan back into the mire. But Zeekel has already, in a scene of great violence, forbidden Jim to visit the house. Zeekel will kill him if he puts his nose in at Joan's door; Martin will kill him if he refuses to pass the night there. Jim, who is already in the house,

decides to obey his immediate tyrant. Joan walks out, goes to Zeekel, and tells him her plight. Zeekel kills Martin with Jim's knife, and Jim goes to prison.

Up to this point the play has been magnificent, and you might easily have thought it a dramatisation of Hardy. But now it begins to lose grip. Zeekel discovers that he cannot let Jim hang, and talks the matter over with Joan. This scene, which involves a reading from the Bible, is exceedingly moving, though the reading is unduly prolonged, and should not be resumed a second time ; also the matter of the confession should be clinched then and there. Zeekel, who, as the piece is played, is the stronger character, leaves the decision to Joan, who is nothing. She is to make up Zeekel's mind for him, and, if he must confess, tap that night at his window. Then follows a scene in which the local magistrate hints his suspicion of Zeekel. This, again, is weakening. Surely Zeekel must see that if he is to be tripped up he may as well make magnanimous confession. Next comes the hour when Zeekel awaits the message. He passes the time in a diversion of purest bathos—the shaving of his younger brother, Nicholas. This cannot be done on the stage, though the actors glided over it and filled the subsequent leave-taking with pity.

Finally, we see Joan and Nicholas awaiting the tolling of the bell on the morning of the execution. To this it might be objected that the scene would be just as harrowing if it were detached from everything that has gone before. With anything like adequate

playing it must always be unbearable. Mr. Robert Harris was extremely, almost unendurably, good, but Joan, in the person of Miss Moyna Macgill, had long faded from the play. The part simply did not lie within the scope of this actress, who brought to it an appealing voice and some dairy-maidish costumes *à la* Patience, and nothing else.

The men were magnificent. Mr. Malcolm Keen possesses a power to strike terror in his hearers which has been absent from our stage since Henry Irving. It has been said that his performance was too violent for the size of the house. Let the actor abate no jot of his fury. They must build bigger theatres—an easier matter than to create brainstorms of the size of Martin Potten's. (A teacup or a pillbox would have sufficed for the heroine's emotions. Joan should have been played by Miss Edith Evans—how Mr. Dean can be so blind in that direction amazes me—by Miss Laura Cowie, or, possibly best of all, by Miss Mary Clare, who is in the company.) One must be careful with superlatives. Let me say simply that the Zeekel of Mr. Ian Hunter could not have been bettered by any actor I have ever seen. It was quite perfect in its blend of sincerity, power, pathos, *naïveté*, and rustic speech. He was the slow-witted, slow-moving countryman to the very marrow of his bones. Mr. Robert Harris showed signs of genius akin to that of Miss Hermione Baddeley. Judging from two parts only, here is a good actor in the making. Mr. Leslie Banks played the sewer-rat to perfection ; Mr. Clifford

Mollison lifted the village simpleton into those regions where silly has its pristine significance. Miss Ada King endowed with apostolic fervour a part which in any other hands would have descended into comic relief.

January 6.

"The Flame"

ADAPTED FROM THE FRENCH OF CHARLES MÉRÉ
BY J. B. FAGAN

WYNDHAM'S THEATRE

REGRETFULLY one has to admit that if a play is to be highly successful it must be built not upon the shifting sands of truth, but upon the solid rock of untruth. Think for a moment what would have happened if a dramatist of sincerity had written this play round the flame of maternal affection in a *déclassée*. We realise at once that the eternal verities would have been set in motion, that a few enthusiasts would have been moved to rapture, that the Official Receiver would shortly afterwards have been moved to cynical remarks about imprudent theatrical speculation. Reflect now what happens when the tender of the flame is a man of the theatre like M. Méré. The "situations" and moral precepts drawn therefrom, which, sixty years ago, did duty for Emile Augier and Dumas *fils*, and later for Alphonse Daudet and whoever wrote *Zaza*, are taken down from the shelf, dusted and furbished up to look like new. The play is at once an immense success. But *The Flame* is not entirely stupid. Two

of the characters ring true, and there is a moment in the third act when the author stumbles, almost it seems by accident, upon Truth. But he quickly puts that inconvenient lady behind him, and relapses into the sentimental twaddle beloved of French playwrights in the 'sixties.

When the curtain goes up we discover the Earl of Blantyre reading in his library. A lady is announced. " Tell her to write her name ! " The footman returns with a scribbled " Cleo d'Aubigny." The Earl frowns, hesitates, decides. " Show the lady in ! " And at once, in a few rapid sentences, she puts us in possession of the " drame." Cleo is the Earl's mistress of twenty years ago and the mother of his child, custody of which, at a tender age, she had willingly granted his lordship. The Earl has adopted the boy " for keeps." But Cleo, after twenty years of vagabondage, has arrived at " the parting of the ways." What this means is not very clear. Possible her vogue as a dancer is coming to an end ; perhaps she notes a falling off in the attentions of her lovers. It is not sordid calculation, however, which is the motive of Cleo's visit, but hunger for her child. Will his lordship please to give him up ?

His Lordship will do nothing of the kind. Instead, he falls to lecturing Cleo as, in Augier's *L'Aventurière*, Fabrice lectures Clorinde :

> On doit le même outrage
> Aux femmes sans pudeur qu'aux hommes sans courage,
> Car le droit au respect, la première grandeur,
> Pour nous c'est le courage et pour vous la pudeur.

Cleo, according to Blantyre, should have doubled modesty with motherhood twenty years ago: this maternal passion comes too late. He invokes the Deity, and preaches a sermon which brings Cleo to tears, and culminates in a priggish "Ah, you're crying. At last!" And we think to ourselves that, Earl or no Earl, this does not come well from one fellow-sinner to another. Cleo thinks so, too. She does not object to the Earl dissembling his love, but why does he kick her downstairs? She voices this after the manner of her class. "Give me my child, or I'll scream the house down!" she threatens.

"Utter one syllable, and I'll tell my son what kind of woman his mother is!" counters the nobleman. He then tells her that the boy believes her dead. Exit Cleo, vanquished. The Earl rings for his footman. "Did the lady say anything?" he asks, with unlordly anxiety. "No, my lord; she was crying," the hireling replies, and the curtain falls. I am not in a position to say whether this is the kind of thing which habitually goes on in the stately homes of England. All I know is that the scene is almost as good fun as *The Young Visiters*, and that playgoers should arrive in time, so as not to miss a word of it. Mr. Fagan has very wittily stuck to the idiom of the novelette, and makes the pair bandy the most delightful *clichés* about insults which sting like whip-lashes, and children which are "flesh of my flesh," etc., etc. It is all pure nonsense and pure joy.

During the first interval the Earl dies, after instructing Hugo to repair his severities towards his mother. The boy goes to Paris and finds Cleo in the lowest of night *cafés*. She has had " scenes " with her protector, one Boussat, a good-natured bully, who lives by dishonesty on the turf and elsewhere. Slightly intoxicated, she makes advances to the well-groomed English-looking boy, and discovers that he is her son.

The grand scene is now due, and takes place next morning in Hugo's private sitting room at the Ritz Hotel, Paris. In it the author delivers himself of a good deal that is true. Hugo is very much his father's son, and just the kind of young *exalté* who would want to reform Cleo at sight, without knowing anything at all about her, or realising that she is what she is and that to take her away from her setting is to annihilate her. With the essential arrogance of the young athlete who takes a cold tub every morning he desires to know nothing of Cleo's way of life, makes no effort to understand it or her love for Boussat. But Boussat, who knows Cleo and Cleo's world, demolishes the high-minded, ignorant young shaver in a series of tremendous tirades. He argues, with a wealth of gesture which suggests " by these pickers and stealers," that it is a worthier thing to fight for life and with life than to be born to riches and ready-made high-falutin principles. Better an industrious pickpocket than an idle peer is his theme.

Boussat's arguments may not be unimpeachable ;

the point is that they deal in one aspect of truth, that the play suddenly takes on sincerity, and the audience is immediately moved. But Hugo sticks to his guns, and his utmost concession is that Cleo shall choose between them. She decides for Hugo. And the play subsides to its original state of bathos.

A famous critic once made the point that Clorindes are Clorindes because Fabrices are Fabrices. But we have moved on since then. "I am I," Magda has said, and we see now that Clorindes are Clorindes for the sufficient reason that they are themselves, and nobody else. The whole point of this play, were it serious, must be the perception gradually dawning upon mother and son that Cleo is Cleo, always was Cleo, and always will be Cleo. They must perceive that to be *bonne fille* is something, whereas to be an imitation great lady is nothing. "I hate to see dead people walking about: it is unnatural," says Mr. Shaw. Certainly a reformed Cleo is not alive. But truth has always required a Shaw or an Ibsen to stand up to her. What actually happens in the fourth act is the old frippery about the woman not being able to wear the right clothes or say the right thing to the right people, who, of course, are the parents of the young woman with whom Hugo falls in love. The usual Lady Orreyed—from *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*—turns up, and Cleo, going into ecstasies of self-sacrifice, sinks back tearfully into the mud for which she has long had a genuine nostalgia.

Cleo and Boussat, like Mr. Shaw's Dora Delaney and Bobby Gilbey, " will be inexorably condemned by respectable society to spend the rest of their days in precisely the sort of company they seem to like best and be most at home in." M. Méré apparently deems this to be the couple's fitting punishment, whereas Mr. Shaw's Fanny knew it to be the reward of two people daring to be themselves. But, then, Fanny and her creator are the bugbear of film audiences. And this play is a film—with words.

The actors handled it like good film actors—that is, with immense and portentous gravity. No Lady Macbeth was ever quite so tragic as Miss Violet Vanbrugh's Cleo, who out-vamped anybody I have ever seen. The actress made constant use of the lowest tones of her voice, and it was probably her author's fault that we saw no traces of her admirable gift of comedy. Mr. Dawson Milward was good—he can never be anything else. But M. Méré's Earl was dead and lying in state upstairs before the show began. Mr. Sam Livesey made great play with Boussat, who was really alive, and the tirades were carried off magnificently. There was a clearness of outline, a precision, and depth of emotion about the Hugo of Mr. Ralph Forbes which at once put that young actor into the front rank of *jeunes premiers*. Mr. Forbes, whom I have never seen before, strikes me as being, now that Mr. Francis Lister is in America, the best juvenile lead in the country. Whether he shows the romantic promise of Mr. Robert Harris is another

matter. He should join some play-producing society at once. Miss Olive Sloane's "Lady Orreyed" was very amusing, and Mr. Gerald Cross played two tiny parts quite extraordinarily well.

January 13.

"The Mask and the Face"

ADAPTED FROM THE ITALIAN OF LUIGI CHIARELLI BY C. B. FERNALD

EVERYMAN THEATRE, HAMMERSMITH.

REVIVED, CRITERION THEATRE

THE programme calls this piece a comedy ; in my view it is an intellectual farce of the nimblest, wittiest, most delightfully outrageous description. It is the best light entertainment I have seen for a very, very long time.

Like all really good things it declines to be gutted in a quarter of a column, and I shall not try. Sufficient if I say that it begins with a husband or chattel owner, a fire-eater who would punish infidelity with death. His wife deceiving him, or pretending to, he is forced to make good his vaunts. He banishes the lady to London, gives out that he has murdered her, surrenders to his trial, and is gloriously acquitted. Flowers, telegrams, cinema stars, the Town Band, all Italy, *redenta* and *irredenta*, greet and acclaim him.

A turn in the plot obliges him to find the body, for which he utilises a statue, and to hold a public funeral, on the eve of which his good lady very provokingly turns up. She woos her husband from his sulks and folly, and mentions incidentally that the candles at the head and foot of her coffin are spoiling their best carpet.

The last act, in which the mourners await the moving off of the cortege and beguile the time with their private inclinations and jealousies, is deliriously funny. Or would be if you did not hold yourself in so as not to miss the lift of an eyebrow. The scene takes place in whispers and dumb-show. Upon this mute, malicious assembly the husband suddenly breaks in, in a grey suit and pink tie, forgetful, in dalliance with his lady, of the awful nature of the occasion. The genius of this scene is purely visual, and is a reversal of the stroke so cunningly used by Wilde when he made Worthing enter in unexpected mourning.

The dialogue is extraordinarily deft and witty, landing the speakers into constant quandaries as between immediate sense and ultimate reason. "I must do my duty as a Christian," says the old Italian servant demanding burial for her mistress's body. "How dare you?" replies the outraged husband, annoyed at having to fish in the lake for what he knows is not there. "Your mind will not be at ease," his friends tell him, "till you have buried your wife." And so on.

The piece was very well played, though perhaps the

best performance was that of a minor character, the Mayor, grotesquely, owlishly presented by that very clever actor Mr. Michael Sherbrooke. Mr. Franklin Dyall's Ogre was really excellent in the last act. I imagine that, in the earlier ones, an Italian actor might have been better. Mr. Dyall was so serious that we just didn't laugh at him, whereas he should have been so serious that we couldn't help laughing. The whole performance wants transposing into burlesque, and the part were better played perhaps by an actor with a comic personality taking himself, for the nonce, with immense seriousness. Mr. Brember Wills contributed a first-class character sketch. Miss Athene Seyler was beyond all praise. A full house gave the piece a great reception. Oh that West End managers had eyes, ears, or brains, or the sense to hire them !

February 10.

If this "farcical comedy" does not succeed it will be because it is too good. It is significant that Thursday's audience laughed most loudly at the poorest joke in the piece—the one in which it is suggested that the pretended murderer shall lay the foundation stone of the new lunatic asylum. These last two words, in which there is nothing intrinsically funny, set the house in a roar. The piece, originally produced at Hampstead, is really brilliant. A comic idea gives rise to farcical happenings ; the personages remain in the key

of comic observation, whilst what they do is riotously funny.

Signor Chiarelli is reported to have said that there is only the very remotest resemblance between the original piece and this "free adaptation," which only proves that a really good tree can bear two different kinds of fruit. (This is true in art whatever it may be in horticulture.) The reader remembers the plot, and how the fun springs, not from a room having too many doors, but from a man's sense of dignity being many times too large. Count Mario holds the view argued by Dumas *fils* in *La Femme de Claude*, that a husband is entitled to kill a faithless wife. Nay, more. He maintains that to murder a woman in these circumstances is "an act of elemental propriety." Five minutes after the Count has expounded this view with the utmost vigour and emphasis, he discovers his wife, Savina, in a compromising situation. What to do? He pretends to murder her, sends her abroad, is acquitted at the trial, and acclaimed as a hero.

The practised playgoer will divine the complications —how circumstances force Mario to produce a body and how Savina, heavily veiled, attends her own funeral. But he will have to visit the theatre to get any idea of Mr. Frank Cellier's magnificent stupidity and Miss Athene Seyler's exquisite fun. Mr. Cellier, like all good Shakespearean actors, is a bit too big for most modern parts; but this assumption of megalomania suits him admirably. Mr. Franklin Dyall turned the Count into Iago; Mr. Cellier clothes him in splendid

absurdity. "When a man becomes ridiculous to his wife she soon ceases to love him," Mario declares. It is worth while going to the theatre to hear Miss Seyler's "Oh, no, my dear!" The whole company is excellent.

June 1.

"Man and the Masses"

ADAPTED FROM THE GERMAN OF ERNST TOLLER
BY LOUIS UNTERMEYER

THE STAGE SOCIETY

FIRST, all honour to the Stage Society that it should have produced this play. Ernst Toller was president of the Council in Munich during the short Soviet *régime* of March, 1919. The veto upon the work is still absolute in that town, and its author is still a prisoner in the fortress of Niederschönenfeld. He will be released in July after five years' expiation of a political offence. That we, in free England, should produce the work of a German fighting for what he deems to be Liberty is a gesture of, at least, intellectual brotherhood.

A correspondent suggested that I have "fallen to the propaganda of Andreyev's play. . . . Done into English, it may do no more harm than the ineffable Toller's *Man and the Masses*." And I am warned that in praising these plays I am accelerating the final disintegration of British society and the ruin of the workers.

I am reminded here of a passage in *King Solomon's*

Mines. One of the Englishmen is telling the African natives that he and his party have made intentional descent from the moon, in support whereof he cites his preliminary study of the Zulu language. "Only, my lord," objects an astute heathen, "thou hast learnt it very badly." My correspondent has learned Toller's lesson worse than badly; he has not learned it at all. And I do not feel that he has got at the root of Andreyev. In my notice of that play I said explicitly: "Our sympathies are not maudlinly invoked. We deplore the crime, and are not invited to side with Anarchy." That statement is not, I submit, open to misconstruction. Andreyev's piece has nothing to do with political right or wrong. It is a study of ecstasy in martyrdom; and, incidentally, the spectator is made to feel extraordinarily sorry for the fat little Governor whom the five would have done to death. I admit that the play shows signs of revolutionary stress. But is it not arguable that a country in which nobody wants to rebel against anything is likely to go, in Henley's words, "fattening, mellowing, dozing, rotting down into a rich deliquium of decay"? And I suggest that if my correspondent will refer to Shakespeare's Sonnet LXVI. he will find a protest against Privilege which must have annoyed the Shallows and Silences of his day. Doubtless they, too, had the itch to "keep such a firebrand in gaol."

The time has gone past when we can pretend that in considering any burning testament we can entirely divorce manner from matter. It would be absurd to

pretend that what advanced minds are thinking in Russia and in Germany is, for us, a question of æsthetic only. *Man and the Masses* is not entertainment alone. If Toller's piece were the most flaming revolutionary manifesto ever devised, it would still be my duty to set it forth with as much accuracy as I am capable of, and to leave political judgment to my readers. The case happens, however, to be exactly and expressly contrary. Toller teaches exactly what our own Mr. Halcott Glover taught in *Wat Tyler*. His John Ball urged the mob to holy war ; Glover showed it returning drunk with pillage and slaughter. Ball propped the mass above earth, and we are told how the very spirituality of that support was the undoing of the individual. Man, Toller points out, is not Mass, and never can be.

The Woman, as she is simply called, seems to me to preach the creed of John Ball. She is strong in dreams and weak in actions. What she would highly, that would she holily ; and, like all leaders of new thought, she reckons without the mob which is to translate words into deeds. She forgets that you cannot indict a social order, or, rather, that the only practicable form which indictment can take is violence to the individual, on the heels of which follows the still greater injury to the violent, who rush together in mutual destruction. "Wat Tyler and John Ball destroy each other to the end of time. Only Hodge remains." Mass destroys Mass, says Toller ; only Man remains. I do not remember that we put or wished Mr. Glover in gaol.

It may be said that this is a very poor "story of the play." I hardly mean it to be a definite story, for the simple reason that, upon a single hearing, I would not venture to tie this work to a single interpretation. Toller was poet, not propagandist, but he wrote in prison, in a time of great national strain. He chose a purely "expressionistic" medium, and his "characters" are neither individuals nor types. They are the mouthpieces of the Idea. The Husband—or so I take it—is Freedom broadening down from precedent to precedent, and a great deal too slowly for the Nameless One, or impatient torch of revolution. There are choruses of Workmen, Convicts, Courtesans, Bankers, Gaolers, Sentries, etc., etc., and their convolutions might have been arranged by some Expressionist painter. The thing is virtually ballet, and it would not surprise you to read on your programme: "Choreography by Mr. Mark Gertler."

The staging was extraordinarily good, and one remembers some striking pictures: the platform resting literally upon masses of men lifting despairing arms, the doll-like, jazzing Bankers, the dance of The Condemned, the Mob beginning to see Red, its Agony and Betrayal. Set over against these was the calm figure of the Woman who has created a child and discovered in it a Cain.

The highest praise must be accorded to Miss Thorndike for her presentment of the Woman. She spoke exquisitely throughout, and touched Beauty at the lines:

O path through the ripe wheat fields
In August days. . . .
Wandering in the wintry mountains
Before dawn. . . .
Tiny beetles in the breath of noon. . . .
O world. . . .

To imprison a poet who could write this does not seem to me the highest form of sense. But, of course, I may be wrong. Mr. George Hayes played the Nameless One as he played Aaron, with immense gusto and perception. Among the phantasmagoria I detected in doing right Messrs. Raymond Massey, Victor Lewisohn, Milton Rosmer, Eugene Leahy, Bruce Winston, and Mesdames Marie Ault and Drusilla Wills. But the whole of the big cast acted very well, and the production will rank high in the Society's annals. The scenery of Mr. Aubrey Hammond and the music of Mr. J. H. Foulds vied in imagination and significance. To Mr. Casson, for his overseeing, immense praise is due.

May 25.

"Tiger Cats"

ADAPTED FROM THE FRENCH OF MADAME KAREN BRAMSON BY MICHAEL ORME

SAVOY THEATRE

IN the foyer during the intervals, and in the crush at the end, one heard excited feminine protestations that women are not as they are portrayed in this play. "The critics will make that point, dear!" was one remark which seemed to be of particular intention.

Madame Bramson had let loose a tiger-cat among the pigeons. Obviously all women cannot be like Suzanne Chaumont; equally obviously some women may be. To judge by the films, half the female population of America must belong to this category, since "tiger-cat" is merely English for "vamp." Indeed, this play looks, at the beginning, very like the one and only imbroglio which the brains of a whole continent have devised for the picture medium. There is André Chaumont, the scientist, who is so taken up with his studies that he neglects his pretty wife and allows her to attend, unchaperoned, those functions in which champagne and leopard skins play so significant a part. There is the prowling, amorous baron seeking

whom he may devour. But there the resemblance ends. The husband is no phenomenon of absorption concealing prodigies of passion not to be revealed until six reels have unwound their weary way ; the wife is no innocent, virtuous not so much *to* the core as *at* the core, the way to which skirts all the frailties of the feather brain.

No, Suzanne Chaumont has all the qualities of the courtesan save her courage. She likes ropes of pearls, soft clinging silks, smooth, thick furs. " Am I not a woman ? " she asks, giving the *ewig weibliche* a cynical twist. Suzanne's way to these things lies through marriage, and, to her immense disgust, she finds that she has married the wrong man. André, her husband, is probity itself and something of an *exalté* who prefers to write unsaleable books about nervous disorders to setting up in business as a nerve specialist with a fine profile and expensively furnished rooms. That Suzanne's sister should have married a mint of money does not improve Suzanne's temper. In the offing is the Baron, exuding oil from his Rumanian wells.

Here, again, the play seems likely to follow a well-worn path. But two more factors presently emerge. One is Suzanne's doubling of the greed for money with a tigerish hunger for passion ; the other is André's deliberate, considered detestation of his wife, not so much in her own person, but as the type of wantonness and luxury. He plays with the idea of killing her. In the meantime Suzanne arranges a motor drive with the Baron, and contrives that the car shall break down late

at night in a remote country village. André has frequently offered to allow Suzanne to divorce him, which, in view of her private fortune, she might accept but will not. Now, being in a position to give her husband sufficient grounds for divorcing her, she will challenge him by telling him to his face that she has a lover. She is, in a way, chained to him ; chained by her failure to engross him. Hell hath no fury, etc., etc. She tells him about her escapade. Taunts him would be a better phrase. André does not believe her, and, infuriated by this last and detestable lie, shoots her. But Suzanne will not die, and gathers the threads of her life together for the accomplishment of a supreme revenge. She tells the examining magistrate that her husband was the victim of justifiable jealousy. André denies this, and claims that his deed was an act of simple justice executed upon a worthless woman. He is not believed, and the magistrate insists upon a plea of justification.

So far so good. It was with immense satisfaction that we heard André's " Is it credible that I should have acted from so mean a motive as jealousy ? " But now, alas, the play has had enough of adventuring among unbroken ground, and its interest rejoins the familiar, sentimental stream. Proof is tendered to André that his wife had spoken the truth, that her story of unfaithfulness was more than a barb of malice. He becomes furiously jealous, and under that lash passion is reawakened. " All along " he had always loved her ! Here Mme. Bramson has been unable to

get away from the French novelists, who have written hundreds of volumes about the husband full of spiritual loathing of the woman to whom he is tied, yet unable to resist "le parfum énivrant de son corps." This is a pity, since it makes the husband incredible throughout. Logically he should have shot somebody, himself at a pinch. We leave André laying at Suzanne's feet his work, his will power, and his whole being, whilst she, egotism incarnate, soars into the slaked empyrean, the lights of apotheosis playing about her face.

Miss Edith Evans was the tiger-cat. *C'est tout dire.* Or, rather, that is not to say nearly enough. It is not as though there were only one Evans, as there was only one Duse. There are as many Evanses, it would seem, as there are women in your playwright's imaginings. Out of some invisible wardrobe this actress dips for temperaments as Munden dipped for faces and Suett for wigs. Her Suzanne is equally removed from the sparkle of her Millamant as from the frowsiness of her typist in *The Adding Machine.* Suzanne has lustre, but it is the superficial glaze covering earthenware. She has no soul and no mind ; her volitions are mere appetites. She has nothing womanly in any of the nobler senses of that word ; she is purely feminine, according to ignoble interpretation. Can any other actress so act with every line and curve of her body ? To suggest the claws of the tigress and the caged, restless walk was obvious and easy. To crouch upon the sofa as you may see her prototype hug a branch in Regent's Park, was equally child's play. But to make

us conscious, as we were made conscious, of the fruition in one single human being of millions of years of rapacity in pre-existent states of reptile, bird, fish, mammal, without rasping accent or accentuated leer—this could have been the achievement of none but a very great artist. Miss Evans has every physical advantage for the part. She is, Heaven be praised, plain in the sense that you might call the Monna Lisa plain ; to look upon her is to know the dwindling quality of mere prettiness. I should call her voice glorious, if it were not that I want that word for her intelligence.

Mr. Robert Loraine was quite extraordinarily good, and, frankly, I was not prepared for so much restrained power. He made no noise, and achieved the feat of holding us after the great scene of provocation in which Miss Evans would certainly have swept off the stage anything that was not absolute sincerity of purpose and certainty of execution. The pair were good enough to swamp even Mr. Nicholas Hannen. Miss Nadine March played the Countess as though she were a little dressmaker engaged by the hour.

June 29.

This piece, which was recently tried out for half a dozen matinées, has now gone into an evening bill. It is sure to arouse a good deal of discussion. Are there predatory women in real life as well as on the American screen ? Have husbands any remedy beyond putting notice in the newspapers that after such and such a date they will not be responsible for any debts con-

tracted, etc., etc. ? The answer is yes and no. There are such women, and there is no remedy.

The piece was fully described in this column when it was first given, and there is no need to go into it all over again. I am tired of praising Miss Edith Evans, and will simply say that her acting is rather too good for the piece, which constantly lets her down. For example, the husband tells Suzanne that he never really loved her, and that his early image of her innocence lies about him in ruins. Miss Evans—and I welcome the chance of picking a quarrel with her—wears a wonderful expression on her face here, and you feel that she is going to round on the man and ask him what he meant by taking her without love. But her next remark has only to do with some parlourmaid's remonstrance upon being called a ruin. In other words, the actress did a fine thing in the wrong place. It was very naughty of her, and I hope she will go on doing it. For I am quite sure that she does similar things thirty or forty times in the course of the play, only I have not detected them. How else explain the drop to banality of the piece when Miss Evans is not on the stage ? Anything more stupid than the jabbering scene of quarrel and reconciliation between Suzanne's sister and her husband I do not remember. Suzanne, we are told, is at the point of death, the doctor is operating, and the pair have forgotten her existence!

Candour compels me to admit that I liked Mr. Loraine in this part much less on a second visit. He

seemed both pompous and theatrical, and talked of having been in a state of " blind fury and anguish " when he had given no evidence of the kind. It is true that he upset the furniture and disarranged his hair, but they were gestures " according to plan " and obviously the result of rehearsal. It was difficult to feel pity for this strong, loquacious nerve specialist with enough self-pity and tears in his voice to go round the whole faculty. And what a fool the fellow was too ! He should simply have slapped Suzanne hard, very hard, twice a day for a month and locked himself in his study so that she could not pester him. But it was not Mr. Loraine's fault that he had to utter all the words set down for him and to make that disgraceful surrender at the end, and he did succeed in holding the stage after Miss Evans had temporarily left it after the shooting incident. And that was certainly an achievement. Mr. Charles Quartermaine demonstrated how to make a rapid exit through folding doors without getting the tails of a morning-coat caught in the process, but otherwise his part was a poor one. Miss Nadine March's French countess would not, I think, have been recognised as such across the Channel.

August 17.

"Fata Morgana"

ADAPTED FROM THE HUNGARIAN OF ERNEST VAJDA BY JAMES BURRELL AND PHILLIP MOELLER

AMBASSADOR'S THEATRE

THERE are times when one is glad to be a dramatic critic, and last Monday evening was one of them. There was a fine and moving play, which introduced to many of us the finished and subtle art of Miss Jeanne de Casalis. But there was more than this. There was a piece of acting by a young American, Mr. Tom Douglas, which contained more of pathos and spirituality than anything I have seen for many years. Tennyson did not think more exquisitely of Galahad than Mr. Douglas has done upon his Hungarian innocent. It is fitting that a critic, who by the very nature of his work must often appear to lean to the carping side, should seize and proclaim those rare occasions when the standard to which all his judgments are referable is made manifest for all to see. Mr. Douglas's acting in this piece is exquisite, and I am not going to qualify this with any pretended humility about a personal opinion. I am going to say straight

out that the perfection of this performance is as absolute as the Standard Pound or the Standard Yard, and that anybody who does not agree is just wrong !

The play is a tragi-comedy of youth—comedy for the woman of the world who would beguile a dull evening, tragedy for the youth whose first draught of pure love turns to poison even as he drinks. George is a Richard Feverel, who, clasping Lucy, awakes to find that he has held in his arms a Mrs. Mount. The scene of the seduction is nobly tragic : we, sitting in the theatre, would cry out to prevent such tarnishing. A child should not grow to man's estate at the bidding of evil. The agony here is spiritual, and I cannot see that a scene should be modified, as some of my colleagues have suggested, which renews our faith in the beauty of innocence. We do not take delight in the enchantress, and we know that her design is fell.

This first act is excellently written. The boy is in trouble with his parents. He has been ploughed for his semi-final, and in a fit of romantic melancholy, and also, perhaps, for a lark, has betaken himself for two days to the river, eating and sleeping with the fisher-folk. As punishment for this truancy he may not go to the ball which is to be held in the neighbouring town. The fête is a national one, and George is left alone in the countryside with the dogs and the stars. Or almost alone. He has tackled his books and thrown them over for a "good read" at what we guess to be a Fenimore Cooper, or its Hungarian equivalent. Then a chum steals in at the window, with a proposal that

they shall run off to the town and talk to the girls in the cafés. George will have none of this : woman, he might have said with Hamlet, delights him not. The friend is sent about his business. And then George's cousin, the fascinating, town-bred wife of a Buda Pesth lawyer, arrives unexpectedly. The boy must play host, and the woman finds him attractive.

All next day he is on fire with his new passion, which he can hardly conceal. The husband, a comic figure in the high Meredithean sense, arrives with his winnings from a big case. These are to provide his delighted wife with a six weeks' jaunt to Deauville. The gadding creature snatches at the notes and then becomes conscious of George, who has been a silent watcher of the scene. He cannot understand. The woman remembers how, on the previous evening, she had babbled of eternal love. She sees the agony in the boy's face, returns the notes, and murmurs something about staying on at the farm. Recriminations with the husband ensue, and George, intervening, bids the fellow respect his, George's, fiancée.

Now the boy's passion comes out in a spate of childish exaltation and wholly manful purpose. He blurts out to the husband that his wife hates and despises him and will sue for a divorce, so that she can marry him, George. In his innocence he does not see the force of the implication. But the others do. The wife makes hysterical denial, the husband threatens a duel, the boy's parents realise that their son is no longer a child. But the woman is not wholly bad,

and, left alone with her lover, tries not only to persuade him to take back his confession, but also to repair the hurt she has done. Surely he sees that promises made at such a moment cannot be taken seriously? The boy sees nothing of the kind. His love was more than serious; it was sacred.

The scene ends with the boy promising to pay his debt—the debt of innocence. There has been some talk of shooting, and for half an hour we are left in suspense. Suicide is obviously in the boy's mind. But this turns out not to be the case; he means no more than that he will formally deny his love. I think the words, "I will pay my debt" should be omitted. Uttered, they must have maximum significance. The third act shows the woman's retrieval of her position, and the breaking of the boy's heart. And the play ends with a scene between father and son, which shows that a good dramatist may write successfully for the modern theatre and not lose touch with Beauty.

Mr. Douglas did more, I think, for his hero than even the author could have hoped. That the actor had charm and an eager boyish spirit as well as pathos is important, but there were better things in the playing than mere natural advantages and a sufficient technique. This youth had not lost the wonder of first love, to which he brings what Troilus calls a "winnow'd purity." He brings, too, a fine mind and the incapacity to believe in baseness. How do we know this, since this is realistic, not poetic drama, and the help of the soliloquy is not invoked? We know it simply through

the actor's silences. He utters no word as he watches the woman's playing of the husband and her gradual decline from loveliness. But his face, to use a trite phrase, speaks volumes. He knows now the evil of wantonness which destroys more than the mirage of love. Here is the evil which defiles the world. All this is not to say that Mr. Douglas is a great actor. To be a great actor there must be command of more notes in the gamut than that of wistfulness. But for this boy to say : " I've never been so happy," and to compress into those five plain words the rapture of a hundred lines of Romeo is, I venture to maintain, a feat of great acting.

Miss Jeanne de Casalis played with great skill and intuition. Her part was immensely difficult, and only the nicest tact could have kept it on this side of vulgarity. Throughout, the actress was never within hailing distance of a mistake. Mr. Reginald Bach had a fine moment at the end, and Miss Ethel Coleridge was good in a rather ordinary, competent sort of way. But the author's subsidiary people have lost in translation the racy characteristics which in the original one thinks they may have possessed. Mr. Ion Swinley is a romantic who does not take kindly to being ridiculous in a morning-coat.

September 21.

"No Man's Land"

ADAPTED FROM THE FRENCH OF FRANÇOIS DE CUREL BY ASHLEY DUKES

ST. MARTIN'S THEATRE

Un peu de guerre,
Un peu d'amour,
Un peu de rêve,
Et puis bonjour.

IS that how the old jingle goes? Anyhow, it sufficiently represents this piece. To immure within four walls for a single night in war time and behind the German lines a French spy and a German princess—*c'est tout dire.* Add that each knows the other's identity, that the lady is determined to hand the spy over to her husband, the General, at ten o'clock next morning and that the spy is equally determined to kill her before that hour. He would shoot here and now, only the house is his mother's, and they have no way of disposing of the body, the inevitable discovery of which must lead to the old lady's execution. The spy would lure the princess to walk with him in an adjacent wood where he may dispatch her in safety, but her Highness is, as they say, "wise" to this.

In the end the pretended love-making turns to the real thing. Sleep, however, is not allowed to knit up this melodramatic sleave of care. Neither dare snatch a wink, for the other's hand clutches a revolver tucked away under the bolster. So in the end the mother has to do the horrid deed, and the spy goes off with astonishing equanimity, leaving his mistress weltering in her gore and his mother telling her beads in expectation of the Boche. The whole thing seems to me essentially theatrical, but it makes good melodrama none the less. Your Frenchman is an incurable romantic, and when once La Patrie takes the floor common sense flies out of the window. We English see things differently, and in this case would hit upon some bargain. Tommy is worlds away from this sighing, spying Frenchman, and to be credible to us this piece needs a touch of Bairnsfather.

Miss Haidée Wright, as the mother, did the thing a disservice by striking the note of intensity long before there was need. It was a fault on the producer's part to allow this. But Mr. Reginald Denham, though he has done excellent work, is a very young producer, and Miss Wright is a player of very great experience and renown, so that correction was probably hardly to be thought of. Still, somebody must tell Miss Wright that she does her finest strokes the worst injury by making unnecessary use of them. The heartrending effect of her famous quaver in the voice is largely discounted by using it for such lines as " Hurry up with the dinner," and " Your room is being made ready

for you." On the other hand, the actress delivered the significant "They marched across our fields" without trace of emotion. Frankly, I was disappointed in this performance, which I had hoped would rival Réjane's in *Alsace*. But it was worlds away, and Miss Wright has yet to acquire the Frenchwoman's genius for being ordinary when nothing more is wanted.

But I think if I had been Mr. Denham I should have plucked up courage to tell that fine actor, Mr. Malcolm Keen, not to be quite so nonchalant over a freshly-committed murder, and not to bear himself so easily in the murderer's clothes which, later, he is to declare a pest and agonisingly tear off. And not to let us forget quite so easily that his love-making is a screen for murder.

As the Princess Miss Betty Ross Clarke was charming and unaffected and schoolgirlish, but what the part really demanded was style and a touch of the grand manner. In a realistic play a German princess may with perfect propriety be the undistinguished little Hausfrau; in melodrama she must assume the feathers insisted upon by the young lady in *The Gondoliers*. Miss Bannerman, Miss Evans, or Miss Compton might have interested us, though much of the *rôle* is as tedious as Strauss's Marschallin without the music.

Mr. Denham was not to blame here, but I do think he should not have used obvious moonlight when the words are "What a glorious morning!" On the whole not an outrageously successful evening, redeemed by two minutes of good acting by Mr. Kenneth

Kent as the second spy. As I do not know the French play I can offer no opinion on the merits of the adaptation. But the lines of Mr. Ashley Dukes fell on the ear with a naturalness foreign to most translations.

November 30.

Modern Plays

"Havoc"

A Play by HARRY WALL

Haymarket Theatre

THIS piece is an immense success. All London is going to see it, and all London will be right. The actors who scored most on that earlier Sunday night had been retained, and to one of them was accorded the most spontaneous and enthusiastic show of liking which I have ever witnessed in the case of an actor playing a subsidiary *rôle*. The name of the player is Richard Bird; his part that of a second lieutenant during the war. Early on in the second act "the Babe" had taken all hearts. This was the perfect incarnation of a type which, for better or for worse, stands for our English race. The Babe has never heard of Rupert Brooke, and would indignantly deny that he is one of that poet's "swimmers into cleanness leaping"; poetry is far from him, and he would frown if you were so misguided as to talk love of country. His day is wholly absorbed in attending to the gramophone and "chipping" the Sergeant-Major; the space over his bed is plastered with pictures of popular actresses from the illustrated papers. Michael Angelo

and Beethoven are small beer in comparison with Bairnsfather and Melville Gideon; he has never heard of Chelsea, and if he were to hear, it would only be to laugh. He has perfect health, the temper of a boy, and the heart and brain of a child.

Thoughts about our young English subalterns of those days may well lie too deep for tears. Yet, if I had cared to pry, it would not have surprised me to find that the eyes of my neighbours were wet. It is certain, however, that other of their thoughts were of the order which comes to the surface in bubbles of happy laughter. It was the third act which called forth the demonstration. It may be that in the dug-out the actor had to be no more than himself—and one does not award marks for that any more than for having a particular shape of nose. But the tale of shell-shock and cowardice had to be told with art, and it was very beautifully told. When the act-drop fell there was long and loud applause for Mr. Faber, Mr. Kendall, and the other actors. Then the house began to shout "Bird! Bird!" and the young actor, whose *rôle* was third in order of importance, was given a "curtain" all to himself. The call was repeated many times. Some day, perhaps, when Mr. Bird is an old man and has betaken himself to theatrical memoirs, he will read how the pit rose at this and that actor of the past. I imagine that he will look back with pride to the fact that once, at least, in his own life he had that recognition which is the actor's supreme reward.

To be perfectly candid, the play is not the compre-

hensive stuff which Mr. Munro, Mr. Drinkwater, or Mr. Galsworthy might have written under this title. The havoc to which we are invited to bring our minds is not the incalculable mental and moral damage wrought in the Soul of Man by War. It can be accurately computed, and a " return " made on an Army Form. The entry would read : Suicide (1), blindness (1), shell-shock (1), killed in action (15). Fifteen men on a dead woman's chest, on the bosom or conscience, that is, of a harpy who was never spiritually alive.

Violet Derring was of the order of pretty ladies which, a few years ago, beguiled Mr. Arnold Bennett into writing one of his less admirable novels. I cannot bring myself to believe that her kind did any other harm, or was ever mistaken, in real life, for anything significant or responsible. But then I do not know her world. Neither, I suspect, does Mr. Harry Wall, the author of the play. Is Violet an adventuress, or is she supposed to have breeding ? Is she a musical comedy actress—we are shown her frock for *Drop it and Run*—or is she just a fool ? Whatever she is she gives interviews to journalists and chatters about her " unconscious " charm. Miss Frances Carson gave a very clever impersonation of this fearsome creature. She made her drift into the room like a soul aswoon, exude that " unconscious " charm by the bucketful, couch upon sofa cushions like a moping panther, and behave generally like the most orchidaceous " vamp."

The objection might be made that to evoke the war is to use a wheel of world-torment out of all proportion to this butterfly. I do not make that objection. Plays, after all, have got to be about something and they may as well be about something concerning which the author also knows something. Mr. Wall obviously knows a good deal about soldiers if not about sirens, and he tells us what he knows without pretending to philosophic significance. His plot is not entirely credible, but that is a way plots have. Nobody in the theatre believed that Roddy Dunton, whose girl Dick Chappell had stolen, would in a company cricket match have run out that bright lieutenant, let alone sending him and the Babe and fifteen others to certain death. No British officer, gentleman and sportsman, would have done such a thing. In sporting parlance the probabilities bumped us here. But we were not bored. It is much less disconcerting in the theatre to be forced to swallow a good big matter-of-fact camel at the start, which you can at once forget, than to be asked to strain at psychological gnats every ten minutes or so. Once you had made up your mind to believe the central incident in *Havoc* the play, as entertainment, followed logically and delightfully. It would have been unbearable if Dick and the Babe had been killed. They were not.

The dialogue was excellent throughout, except for half a dozen sentences, and these could easily have been pruned away. I do not believe that young officers at the front declared their chum's eyes to be the bluest

they had ever seen, or made moan that they were glazed and staring at the stars. I do not believe that when they had lost a trench they went about lamenting that where the Boche is to-day, there, on that hateful spot, they had yesterday gathered primroses. The Babe and his kind may have been cherubim, but they did not quire.

The play interested and amused and moved me so much that it has landed me in a most untidy " notice," all higgledy-piggledy, with actors dotted all over it instead of herded together in a neat little graveyard at the end. I find I have not said how good in a sentimental way Mr. Henry Kendall was, and how strongly Mr. Faber acted ; how very like the real thing were Messrs. Forrester Harvey, Vincent Holman, Claud Allister, and Donovan Maule. Almost I wondered whether these really were actors, or whether Mr. Daniel Mayer had not simply sent round to Wellington Barracks. These impersonations, if they were impersonations, could not be faulted. If Miss Ethel Griffies has not hitherto received her due meed of praise, it can only be because her parts have been " unsympathetic." She was more fortunate here, and had the respect and interest of the house. One of the best actors was the window-shutter, which flapped against the frame with a bodefulness almost Maeterlinckian. Its part was extremely well written.

January 20.

"Progress"

A Play by C. K. MUNRO

The Stage Society

I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick: nobody marks you.—*Much Ado About Nothing.*

MR. MUNRO is one of those intellectual playwrights who make the task of supporting, and, if need be, defending them one of extreme difficulty. "If need be" is ridiculous: *Progress* screams out to be defended, and nothing shall prevent me from doing it. "I have a duty to per-form, and I shall per-form it," as the Mayoress said in Mr. Bennett's play. But since the best form of defence is attack, I shall begin by going for Mr. Munro hammer and tongs, tooth and nail.

Progress is a bad play, but not in the sense in which Johnson declared Milton's *Lycidas* to be a bad poem—"easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting." Mr. Munro's work is not, like the bad commercial play, inept, brainless, twaddlesome.

On the contrary, it is apt to the times, chock-full of grey matter, free from triviality. I do not call *Progress* a bad play because it is "not constructed." Ibsen, we know, took two years to engender each of

his dramas and bring it to birth stripped of its inessentials, spare and taut as a barrel, compact as a French farce. But whereas two years is a short space to a patient old man, it is the dickens of a time to the fiery youngster whom, with all respect, I take Mr. Munro to be. I do not complain because the piece contains neither love interest nor comic relief. Lastly, I am not worried because it is " not a play."

Progress is a political tract. It has as little to do with art or " politics "—by which we are accustomed to mean the struggles of parties and the machinations of politicians—as Mr. Shaw's " metabiological pentateuch " has to do with biology. For whatever that playwright may choose to call *Back to Methuselah*, the fact remains that it is a religious tract. *Progress* deals with the science of government, and I am willing to waive the fact that, being a tract, it cannot be a work of art. There are at the moment more important things in the world than art, and one of them is making miserable men happy and the lands devastated by war fit for ordinary folk to live in.

You can read *Madame Bovary* till you are blue in the face, but I doubt whether it would deter you, if such were your habit, from dubbing your political opponents snobs, muffs, or highwaymen, and this without making the slightest effort to come to mental grips with the principles for which they stand. (It is my personal opinion that not 1 per cent.—no, not one-tenth of 1 per cent.—of the amateurs who in tube and train champion the Capital Levy, or denounce

it either for that matter, have read any handbook setting forth what it purports to be and do. Instead, half of them hash up that old story ending, "Nay, Ah've gotten a pig!") But you cannot sit through *Progress* without taking a definite interest in the theory and practice—that is, the science—of government. The gravamen of my charge against Mr. Munro is that he wilfully and perversely casts his play in such a form that the average spectator cannot sit through it, and so receive that message which Mr. Munro, of all living playwrights, might, if he would, be the best fitted to deliver.

First, what is the message? The world is divided into three States—A, B, and C. (The author calls them by the names of three existing Powers, which is a mistake.) An island in the Pacific is discovered which contains not only cannibals, but koko, a substance which we are to presume of equivalent usefulness to, and cheaper than, iron, steel, brass, copper, rubber, tin, glass, etc. A, to freeze B, forms an alliance with C, and the two make an agreement sharing the island between them. After a time the allies quarrel: C insists upon more than his share, and A's Prime Minister orders two gunboats to proceed to Kokoland. But just as he is issuing the order a wireless message arrives to say that two gunboats belonging to C have entered Kokoland's chief harbour. A declares war, and we see the Cabinet awaiting B's declaration as to her attitude. B's Ambassador arrives. B will help A, provided that, after the victory, Kokoland be ceded

to her. The new Allies win, but they can get nothing out of C, who is bankrupt, and has nothing to offer except her friendship. The offer is made to A. If A will befriend C, then . . . And a new alliance against B is foreshadowed. It is exactly like cut-throat Bridge, and about as profitable.

Now there is nothing here to which we can take the faintest objection. Do you say that this play is *The Rumour* all over again, that the two plays are, in everything but the matter of the squabble and the trifle of the wording, identical and synonymous, " the one as much as the other " ? My answer is that a good nail is none the worse for being hit on the head twice. Do you urge that a tract is not good art ? But I have conceded that, and care nothing so long as the message is a good message and properly delivered.

What Mr. Munro has to say is excellent ; his method of delivery is—well, deplorable. Doubtless Mr. Shaw would have taken these bones, and, clothing them with wit and character, have turned them into some kind of morose comedy. He would occasionally, but not always, have been too long-winded. Mr. Munro presents you with a skeleton, an abstraction of mankind, and makes it talk unendingly. He never stops, credits his listener with no imagination whatever, and will not leave a subject till he has explored every nook and cranny, inlet and outlet, the source of the stream, and that part of the landscape where it rejoins the main ocean. One would not mind if the investigation were pursued once. Personally, I should have

raised no objection if Mr. Munro had seized the occasion to lay before us the whole of what he considers should be Mr. MacDonald's programme. We have agreed that art-canons do not apply. This was a time for talk.

What I did mind very much was that I must be told the same things six times over. Some of the speeches lasted, as near as I could judge, for ten or fifteen minutes. The germ of the oration would be contained in the first three minutes ; the rest would be recapitulation. It is a dreadful thing to know that the next twelve minutes will neither add to, clarify, nor throw a different light upon what you already know. There is a scene in which Lord Mang, very well played by Mr. Fisher White, treats the Prime Minister as Queen Victoria complained that Mr. Gladstone treated her. I do not mind being treated like a public meeting. Only let the speaker credit me with some intelligence, and refrain from reiteration worthy of a dull Old Bailey counsel with a bad case. All Mr. Munro's ardour, his irony, and his admirable "curtains" were drowned in that dreadful spate. I kept watch for three and a quarter hours. When I desisted land was not even in sight.

Mr. Munro may say "That is my way ; I cannot help it." He must help it. Either he or a collaborator could scissor *Progress* into a see-able play. See-able play ? That is not the point. He would make of it a more efficient, effective, effectual, and efficacious message. What more could reformer desire ? This

particular one may say that he is satisfied with a small audience. That is all very well for an artist. As a Hot-Gospeller Mr. Munro has no right to be content with less than a multitude of hearers. It may be that to obtain these he will have to cast his plays in some art form. But the scissors would do. At present he is merely boring the converted, who, if they have sufficient moral courage, slip away before the end.

As spokesman-in-chief, Mr. Nicholas Hannen did really very well, and Mr. Michael Sherbrooke made a magnificent thing of the one dramatic outburst.

January 27.

"Gruach"

A Play by GORDON BOTTOMLEY

"Phoenix"

A Tragic Farce by LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE

The Playbox Theatre

PLAYWRIGHTS and novelists, like tubs, should stand on their own bottoms. I have no sort of patience with those meddlers who would allot a wife to Lear, a girlhood to Lady Macbeth, a family to Traddles and his dearest Sophy, an autumn of discontent to Portia. Where's the thing to stop? I don't see why Mr. Gordon Bottomley and others cannot let Shakespeare alone. They may look before and after, but I pine for the middle bit.

It was in a mood of some prejudice, then, that I attended the performance of *Gruach*. I shall not take upon myself, therefore, to say whether it is a good play or not. Apart from *Macbeth*, it did not seem to me to exist or to have any reason for existing. This story of a young woman who, in midwinter, takes to wallowing

barefoot in the snow in search of edelweiss, bog-myrtle, or what not, dates back to the time of Edgar Ravenswood and his demented Lucy, when the public preferred their heroines to be a trifle " touched." The incident of a Galahad-cum-Perseus turning up on the eve of a distraught female's wedding to a churlish caitiff has gladdened nursemaids' hearts ever since there were nursemaids. That the treacherous and amorous pair should go through a tempestuous love scene, including a duel *à outrance*, and, while Gruach is getting her things together, make enough row to wake the dead, let alone that vigilant old hag Madame Morag sleeping lightly upstairs—all this has existed ever since the theatre was first mooted. The play enshrining these well-worn, time-honoured incidents may or may not be good. I have no opinion.

Blank verse was the reputed medium. Again I can only say that this may or may not have been the case. The only line I remember is Gruach's " I will go upstairs and change my things." This, coming on the top of some rather hectic imagery, was in the nature of a cold douche. It reminded me of a play called *Dorothy o' the Hall*, in which Miss Julia Neilson, as Dorothy Vernon, proposed to exchange clothes with Mary Queen of Scots. " I, by your leave," she said in the properest of blank verse, " will wear your robes awhile." I remember to this day the jollity and gusto with which our loveliest of hoydens would then come out with the romping, prose reflection, " I suppose I must wear something." Mr. Bottomley would have

done a great deal better if he had called his play *Gruach o'Glamis.*

The real interest, of course, lay in spotting in Gruach the seeds of the future Lady Macbeth. These Mr. Bottomley has scattered plentifully. No sooner does the young woman see the upstanding, brawny Scot than she begins to pour her spirits in his ear and chastise him with the valour of her tongue, etc., etc. Her solicitations of him must be excused their unmaidenliness on the ground that they form part of that "metaphysical aid" which, later, was to crown him with the "golden round." Shakespeare, in this piece, is strangely justified. Lady Macbeth is virtually a murderess. She would have stabbed Duncan, you remember, had he not resembled her father as he slept. This is the touch of milky sentimentality which sent Gruach maundering after daffodils in December. But we realise that if the old man had happened to look like Gruach's prospective mother-in-law, Madame Morag, she would have despatched him with the greatest pleasure in the world.

There is another reason why I have so little notion of the abstract value of this play. It was too well acted. Somebody once ventured to say to Sarah that her recitation of some verses was the most heavenly distillation which had ever fallen upon human ears, but —this very faintly—what the verses meant had not been very clear. "Oh!" said Sarah, sitting up and taking notice. "If they want to know the meaning of the words they must encore me, and I will spell

them!" Miss Sybil Thorndike threw so much glamour over Gruach, endowed her with such a wealth of golden hair *à la* Marguerite, looked, with the assistance of the discreetest of spot-lights, so ineffably radiant, and spoke her lines with so communicable a quality of ecstasy that I forgot all about the piece, and remembered only that in this kind of trance-like emotion, this suggestion of auto-hypnotism she is without peer on our stage. And I also could not help wondering why she should have chosen that silly play *Cymbeline*, in which she was wildly unsuited, and based upon it a theory of the unsuitability of Shakespeare to distinguished and popular actresses and the public taste. Let Miss Thorndike consider whether she and Mr. Malcolm Keen, who played the "Envoy of the King of Scotland," might not make a real success in the dagger business, authentic version. Miss Esmé Beringer played Madame Morag with magnificent distinction. My own opinion is that this lady, prior to her marriage with Monsieur Morag, kept a bonnet shop in Edinburgh and bullied her assistants. I propose, with Mr. Bottomley's leave, to write a play on this subject, called *Moddam*. Mr. Felix Aylmer played Conan as if he were Charles Bovary. Which, in fact, he was. This actor is always good.

Phœnix is an improper farce. My acquaintance with Homer is of the nodding variety, and I have to take it on trust that in the original the subject is treated tragically. Mr. Abercrombie has handled it on the lines of Maurice Donnay's *Lisistrata* and *Education de*

Prince. This story of a young, a very young, prince who falls in love with a hired slave, his father's mistress and the doxy of as many of the Imperial Guard as we are allowed to see, is not for English eyes and ears. It is what the French believe us to call "schoking." I gathered that a good many worthy people around me were well and duly shocked. They would be. Personally, I thought that if it had been a little wittier and even a little more frank it would have been very amusing. The piece is, so far as it goes, immensely true to life, and very like Zola seen through rose-coloured spectacles.

Miss Mary Clare romped through it capitally, and Miss Barbara Gott, for once in a way, had not to discharge a bosomful of sorrows. As Phœnix, the *ingénu*, Mr. Robert Harris had some good practice.

January 27.

"The Forest"

A Play by JOHN GALSWORTHY

St. Martin's Theatre

EITHER it happens in a play or I have seen it in a book—I forget which. A noble Earl receives a letter from his son at Oxford in which the lad declares his intention of marrying a barmaid. His lordship rings for his butler, hands him the letter, and says, "Just see to Master William, will you?" And the butler makes his *entrée en matière* with the reproach "Oh, Master William. wot '*ave* we been a-doin' of?"

Were I an old retainer of Mr. Galsworthy as well as an old admirer, I should ask him straight out, "Oh, Master John, wot '*ave* we been a-readin' of?" And I think I could answer the question myself. Mr. C. K. Munro certainly, Mr. de Vere Stacpoole probably, some old numbers of *The Boys' Own Paper* possibly. The opening of *The Forest* is labelled Munro as strictly as certain gambits at chess are labelled Muzio, Evans, and Allgaier-Kieseritzki. What are all these people gathered together in a financier's office and ranged fan-wise upon chairs—the African explorer, the Non-

conformist peer, the Liberal leader, the Foreign Office official, the idealist, the crooked financier—what are they but the conscious or unconscious recollection of figures in *The Rumour?* What of the untutored little savage, Amina, who can find her way with equal skill about her native forest and the hearts of its white invaders, a glutton for murder when "put upon," but up to prodigies of mother-wit and mother-instinct when her lover is in danger—what is this adorable little varmint but pure de Vere? And those natives chunnering "Boria-boola-ga, boria-boola-ga" round a camp fire to the distant throbbing of the tom-tom, handy with bow and arrow as the British yeoman, subtler with poison than Neil Cream—what are these but the beloved companions of boyhood's days?

It is difficult to say whether the play is good or bad; so much depends upon what you mean by those epithets. Mr. Galsworthy's gentle lamp cannot be expected to throw quite so scathing a beam as Mr. Munro's fiercer flare. The financier and his brood are beyond human retribution save that of the poor man's contumely, about which Shakespeare says nothing, perhaps for the reason that its recipient is in a position to make show of equanimity. As for the adventures in the African forest, which take up the greater part of the evening, I can only say that, personally, I would almost as soon have stayed at home and read Mungo Park, H. M. Stanley, or their rival, Rider Haggard. But not quite, for then I should have missed some very good team acting, and one

performance of genius. But these two middle acts were too long, and by the time we got back to our chess we felt as if we had really been to Tsetse-land and back again.

The production is excellent, so excellent indeed that I almost forgot to mention it. Producers should realise that good performance on their part is like a sound axiom—"a thing," as the schoolboy said, "so visible that you cannot see it." True that the cigar box was wrong. "Ah! Divinos!" cried each of the chess players as he "selected" a weed. But the box was of the sort which the tobacconist took down when the young lady demanded a cigar for her gentleman friend. And the management of the curtain was nonsensical. It should be lifted in response to applause and not in anticipation.

But the casting of the parts was almost perfect. Almost, one says, because Mr. Edward Rigby, who is English to the marrow of his marrow, did not make the Baron Zimbosch very credible, and because Mr. Leslie Banks was asked to play with his nerves a part which called for the thews and sinews of a Lyn Harding. One felt that, in spite of his ferocity, his subordinates would have deposed Mr. Banks. Also, perhaps, because that clever actor, Mr. Franklyn Dyall, was allowed, or persuaded, to be Satanic almost to the point of the ridiculous, and one should not laugh at Satan. But Messrs. Nicholas Hannen, J. H. Roberts, Carlaw Grand, Campbell Gullan, Felix Aylmer, Edward Irwin, Ian Hunter, John Howell, and

within the limits of his physique Mr. Banks, were beyond more praise than I have room for. Mr. H. R. Hignett, one of the most sensitive actors on our stage, played the Doctor really beautifully.

There was only one woman's part, and that was entrusted to Miss Hermione Baddeley. Let it be said without hesitation that this child—for she can be little more—has talent which may take her anywhere. She possesses real passion and an almost uncanny knack of getting into the skin of her parts. Her powers are in no way tidied up ; she has no devastating competence ; she can be either so good as to take your breath away, or so bad (as in a French play recently) as to deserve sending home to bed. She is not a great actress yet, but she may become one. Her Amina has all the authenticity of Bret Harte's *Mliss*.

March 9.

"The Farmer's Wife"

A Comedy by EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Royal Court Theatre

MR. PHILLPOTTS has never had the best of luck with his beloved Dartmoor, very much the younger son in comparison with the Exmoor of an older writer. But for *Lorna Doone* his *Children of the Mist* would have been more generally recognised as the magnificent novel it undoubtedly is. When this author began writing there was, you see, hardly any West of England moorland not pegged out. A giant genius had claims extending from Exonbury, on Dartmoor's right hand, all the way to Quartershot, which is as nearly Surrey as makes no matter. To the left prospecting did not seem more hopeful, at least two stalwarts claiming rights in the rich ore of Cornwall. A lesser lover would have forsaken Devon for some unwritten county, say Huntingdon or Rutland. But faithlessness was not for Mr. Phillpotts, who, at the long last, came into his own, west of Thomas Hardy and south of Blackmore. Who to me says Devon to-day conjures up visions of red earth and a mothy coombe, white bread laden with strawberry

jam, clotted cream and wasps, and a belated beam lingering upon this writer's page. This little comedy is very much like that.

At the beginning there was question of a love affair between young George Smerdon, a Corydon whose charms consisted solely in a legacy of five thousand pounds, and Petronell Sweetland, a sullen, moody Phyllis who liked nothing in her lover save his fortune. This part of the play brought to mind a story by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, called *Virginie et Paul.* Two cousins have each attained the age of fifteen, and the boy pays court to the girl in the park, under the moon. He is late, having delayed to wheedle a silver piece out of his father. She urges him not to forget his aunt's birthday, since she is to leave them her silver savings. He bids her mark the silvery note of the nightingale. She calls attention to the silvery moon. They avow a common passion for the country, where life is cheaper. He adores " la chasse," which again may be an economy. It is late. He must fly, lest his father give him no more silver. And the writer concludes : " As the lovers parted, the walls of the château gave back, not the heavenly murmur of a kiss, but the jingle ' De l'argent ! un peu d'argent ! ' "

But to have stressed the five thousand pounds would have meant satire, and Mr. Phillpotts's piece was clearly an idyll. And therefore George and Petronell were not explored, though we felt that the boy would have stood the test better than the girl, who was a mercenary little madam. The play's real motive was

the irksomeness of the widower's state to Petronell's father, Samuel Sweetland, who, like a wiser before him, decided to go once more a-wooing. He woo'd in turn a plump rider to hounds who must have kept more than one horse, a faded lady lavishing upon her villa-residence the affection which poor Miss Flite kept for her canaries, a post-mistress, and a hotel-keeper. But there was nobody on hand to bid this Samivel bevare o' widders, or of spinsters either, and to notify him that their Nay is as like as not to turn into Yea. How the good man got out of his quartet of encumbrances I deem it unnecessary to explain. The end had been foreseen before anybody in the piece had spoken a word. Buxom farmers' wives *in posse* don't darn socks with a seraphic air for nothing.

By far the best character in the piece was a battered and crusty henchman, beautifully played by Mr. Cedric Hardwicke. Old Churdles Ash might have come straight out of Borrow, or again you could imagine cantankerous Samuel Butler taking him to his heart. There was a good deal of observation and humour both in the old man and in the actor's playing of him. So lifelike was he that at times he seemed to turn the stage into your own private well of recollection and imagination, being dipped wherein, the other characters put on a new and shining feasibility. There was one moment when, some twenty people being assembled on the stage, one forgot, or almost forgot, about the theatre, and fell to thinking in terms of some native, endeared village. There is tribute here, not

only to the player who fused the acting round about him to a sensible whole, but to the producer, whose stage picture at this point was a masterly piece of composition.

Mr. Colin Keith-Johnston put some loutish clothes on that perfect Gauguin which was his Adam, and as the clumsy lover acted with perfect felicity. As the farmer Mr. Melville Cooper was unflagging, and Mesdames Chatwin, Gill, and Thornton lent themselves to the guying of their sex with all conceivable good will. It says a great deal for this comedy that it survives, and survives triumphantly, a theme foreign to perfect chivalry. That little matter apart, this farmer's search for a wife is one of the most joyous excursions the theatre of to-day affords.

March 16.

"The Adding Machine"

A Play by ELMER L. RICE

The Stage Society

WHY do the big men in the theatre imitate the little man's passion for big words? "Expressionism"—what fearful wildfowl is that to set before a man hungry for an evening's entertainment? Can't you imagine a conversation in the tube: "What's on at the Exemplary Theatre to-night?" "*The Adding Machine*, an expressionistic drama." "Oh, is it? Well, let's see if we can get into the Pantechnicon. There's no blooming what-d'you-call-it about *Felix Keeps on Walking!*"

Perhaps it is our fault for being skeered of these long words. But, then, those who use them are, on the whole, rather scarifying people. Says Goldberg, summing up Manfred Schneider in *Der Expressionismus in Drama:*

> Expressionism designs for the stage a musicality of word, a broad sweep, a vast simplicity, a preference for types rather than well-characterised individuality, the whole to be infused with, or suffused in, an atmosphere of exaltation. The

> expressionists favour intuition rather than artifice, even in the acting. They would fill their pieces with ideas yet shun the thesis play. They would produce the impression of deep feeling, yet without what we are accustomed to term psychology in drama. Most of all they would abandon the ivory tower and seek social, universal significance.

Mr. Ashley Dukes expands this. In a note on the Stage Society's programme he tells us that Expressionism has very much in common with Melodrama. The latter sacrifices character and plausibility, the former renounces the individual, and the particular act. Melodrama is the drama of outward situation, expressionism represents the drama of mental situation " from which outlines of character are derived and essentials of action ' expressed.' " Well, nothing is ever quite as bad as it looks at first sight except, perhaps, the accounts of absconding financiers. The expressionism of *The Adding Machine* boiled down, so far as the first four scenes were concerned, amounted simply to this—that the characters spoke their thoughts instead of the polite nothings without which society would come to an end. Thus Mrs. Jones would say to her caller, Mrs. Smith, not " Delighted to see you ; won't you come in ? " but " Drat the woman ! Just as I wanted to do a bit of washing ! " And Mrs. Smith would smile sweetly and say not " How lucky to find you in ! " but " I wouldn't have come, only I felt sure you'd be out."

In the first scene Mr. and Mrs. Zero—which name

means that they are any husband and any wife in the wage-earning class—are preparing for bed. He says nothing ; she talks, and pours out the whole of her commonplace, sentimental mind. You can hardly call it talk ; the woman "runs on," as Mrs. Nickleby or Flora might do, upon such matters as the inefficiency of her man, the dullness of her existence, the films she has seen, the jealousies she has experienced, futile threats. The second scene shows the husband at his office desk sitting opposite a woman clerk. He exposes his dull, unimaginative, sneakingly dirty little mind ; she exhibits a dingy romanticism ; and the duet sounds like bowdlerised James Joyce. At the end of this scene the clerk is sacked in favour of a mechanical reckoner. The third scene shows the clerk, his wife, and a party of friends seated in the parlour, all voluble and all damned. At the end of this the clerk is arrested for having murdered his employer. The fourth scene shows his feelings expressionistically—that wretched word is getting longer—in the dock as the lawyers make their footling little moves and counter-moves. The clerk is executed.

Up to this point the whole thing was intensely interesting, and, if you believed in the pessimistic view of the working classes, extremely moving. Personally, I don't altogether agree that the existence of the Zeros is all tragic. I don't believe that the life of the store-worker is a "wale." Are there no street bookies in America ? Is there no baseball, no evening recreation ? We know there is no beer, but is there not chewing

gum? But, given that life in America is wholly Gummidgian, then the presentation was as wholly moving as if it had been expressionless, or, as we should say, realistic. There was a cheering absence of all that toying with hat and gloves, handing round of teacups, quipful butlering—the minuscule traffic of the stage. Whether Mr. Rice has anything new to say in his new medium is doubtful.

His last three scenes, showing Heaven and Hell, in which he seeks to prove that man was once a perfectly good monkey and has degenerated ever since, are highbrow drivel of the most pretentious kind. We must not confuse matter with manner, and though it may be good fun to exhibit humanity as some modern painters do in the form of parallelopipeds and gas tubing, there remains the obligation to do something with the ironmongery. And this particular dramatist does little. It would be nonsense to compare this minor play with any of the major Galsworthys.

It was well produced, though in the trial scene Mr. Brember Wills forgot about expressionism, and harangued the jury to their faces. He should have intoned and monotoned, without gesture, like a man thinking aloud. The women in this play are in more obviously pitiful case. Miss Louise Hampton, as Mrs. Zero, gave one more proof of her great artistry. Was Miss Evans, as the storewoman, a little less good than usual? Perhaps not, but I will hint that she was, and so make show of non-slavish admiration. The great thing about this play is that it was produced and

enjoyed, at least as to four-sevenths of it. Expressionism turns out to be no fearsome bogy after all, and playgoers should not be deterred because of what German professors and Mr. Dukes may say. After all, it may be only their fun.

March 23.

"Conchita"

A Romantic Drama by EDWARD KNOBLOCK

Queen's Theatre

THE production of this play was a *succès de fou rire*, and the curtain came down upon a modernised Pyramus and Thisbe to the accompaniment of almost hysterical laughter. It would be kind, but it would also be uncritical, simply to say that this is a silly little piece which ought never to have been put on. The public has a right to demand the reasons for such a judgment, and here they are.

Or, rather, here are some of them. For to expostulate, as the old gentleman said, why day is day, night, night, and time is time were obviously to waste all three, just as it would be a waste of space to go exhaustively into the ultimate significance of drama and romance. Like Polonius, one would be brief.

Briefly, then, drama, as Mr. Archer recently reminded us, is derived from two sources—imitation and passion. The dramatist creates character in the likeness of human beings, and then makes them express a two-fold quality of passion, theirs and his. In *Conchita* Mr. Knoblock has not bothered his head

either about human beings or any kind of passion, save the comic opera variety. " Ah," objects the reader, " but isn't that just where the romance comes in ? "

The answer to that is : No, it isn't. Or should not be, unless we concede that " romance " has fallen downstairs from the upper regions of fancy into the servants' hall, in the same way that " silly " has declined from its original meaning of " blessed." A romance was originally a species of fictitious writing composed in metre and in the romance dialects ; " hence," says the dictionary, " any fictitious and wonderful tale, any story of extravagant adventures, of love and the like." But in the old days such a label did not necessarily preclude the existence of an originating mind, and you would hardly place in the category of the feeble-witted such practitioners in this genre as Petronius, Apuleius, the authors of *Amadis of Gaul* and *Orlando Furioso*, Chaucer, Malory, Cervantes, Fielding, Morris, Stevenson, Wells. All these writers took human nature for their basis, and upon it erected a structure of passion in which we may include both fantasy and ridicule. Then, all of a sudden, Romance—with an accentuated " o "—took a dive kitchenwards, and the word is now normally used to cover any and every kind of mindlessness. A " romantic drama " has come to mean a harlequinade, in which the characters put on everyday attire while retaining not a fairy but a lunatic irresponsibility. Clown applies his red-hot poker, but Pantaloon does not sizzle.

The programme informs us that *Conchita* is a con-

sidered item in a series of romantic plays which Sir Alfred Butt and Mr. Basil Dean intend to produce at the Queen's Theatre. I would not embitter the relations between these gentlemen by apportioning the onus of such a decision. The prologue in no way divides them. *Conchita* is declared to be "up to specification," for the action passes "not on the plane of reality, but on the level, higher or lower, as you please, of intense emotion and colour."

Well, this is an old story, and we must make the old reply. And that reply is, that "realism" is not one thing and "intense emotion" another. You cannot have emotion wandering at large in the universe like a dirigible adrift. Emotion, if it is to have meaning, must always be a captive balloon, iridescent and colourful as you please, yet chained to the facts of life. Say that romance is colour or embroidery, you still must have something to embroider or put your colour upon, and that something must, in the theatre, be human nature. Whatever is divorced from humanity loses by that divorce its power to interest and amuse. Nothing, for example, which an idiot may do is more pathetic or tragic or humorous or singular or remarkable than any other thing. Nothing that he does is significant because he himself has no significance. Stand Mr. Knoblock's creatures on their heads or on their feet, roll them over on their sides, and they are still nothing; and out of nothing you cannot make anything, still less "intense emotion and colour."

That is why the common man, to use the phraseology

of the programme, smiled when Pyramus, the American sailor, climbed over the wall just in time to prevent Thisbe's guardian from handing her over to the wicked Don Pablo ; when, between them, they murdered the old man and bundled his body into the coal cellar, thereafter indulging in the embraces of a tenor and *prima donna* about to embark upon a duet ; when the sailor, on hearing Pablo's knock, hopped back over the wall to arrange with the skipper of an American man-of-war to give Thisbe safe conduct to a farm way back in Ohio. And it must be confessed that when Thisbe danced under Pablo's threat of thumb-screw and the rack, when Pyramus climbed the wall yet again, when his dainty lady love threw the Colossus by some trick of ju-jitsu and the sailor bound him, and when, finally, both sat on him and Thisbe performed that acrobatic feat known as throwing a cartwheel—this Miss Bankhead actually accomplished—why, then, it must be confessed, the common man laughed loud and long, and the multitude forgot about " planes of intense emotion " and all the rest of it, and broke into what Mr. Robey would term an indecorous guffaw.

It may be held that I have taken this piece too seriously. I do not think so. What is in question here is not the fate of one silly little play, but the news that two of the most influential of our managers intend to give up one of the best theatres in London to a genre which, by their own pronouncement, they show themselves utterly to misapprehend. Romance is a highly coloured and highly charged interpretation of

sober fact, an extravagant vision of drab humanity, just as poetry is the sublimation, not the negation, of sense. We must not allow romance in the theatre to be dragged down to the level of " intense emotion " which prevails in the cinema. The Queen's Theatre must be saved from this.

March 23.

"A Perfect Fit"

A Play by ARTHUR WIMPERIS and HARRY VERNON

Shaftesbury Theatre

CRITICISM should not be arbitrary: it must give reasons. To say that you like this piece and dislike that, and fail to support like and dislike is merely to declare personal predilections. It is a bore to give reasons and a bore to listen to them, but better that than injustice.

A Perfect Fit is superficially no less improbable and no less silly than many another play. Yet it is delightful. Why? The reason is simply that the author, instead of humbugging you in open defiance of the probabilities, invites you to go a little way with him along the path of self-deception. Take that recent comedy in which a married woman, whose husband is abroad, gives a young man a latchkey and then makes a song about her respectability. Later on she is forced to spend the night with her husband because there is a fire in his bedroom and the fire in the sitting-room has gone out. It does not occur to her that she can go out, too, that London is not unprovided with

hotels. And upon this humbugging situation, which we resent, we are invited to build a sentimental last act. The situation is false, and in a false situation no sentiment rings true.

Whereas, in last Thursday's play, there was nothing essentially false except the arithmetic. I submit that no martyr to obesity whose waistline has grown from 37½ inches to 41 will have expanded 4½ inches, even if he have all time to do it instead of the six months of the text. But that is a trifle. What is important is that there is no outrageous attack upon logic. *We are not fooled.*

Do we mind pretending that a dress suit made for a man about town will fit a tailor's assistant? Not in the least! May not even a tailor's assistant be of standard dimensions? Our ready-made emporiums will tell us that he may. Will we also pretend that he can get past the janitor at Lady Bovril's crush? We will. And that Lord Oxo will lend him a "couple of tenners" at sight, to be made into four notes of ten pounds each, two to be returned, one to silence a blackmailing waiter, one to defray the cost of his lordship's supper? With all our hearts. These are nibbles upon probability by consent, and *l'appetit vient en mangeant.*

It would be uncritical to object to the astonishing feats performed by the young tailor when he has put on the stature of a man. He baffles financial magnates at whose nod the Royal Exchange trembles, browbeats dangerous sirens into confessions of humiliation, and

carries on like a blend of Kipps and Sir Galahad. His strength is as the strength of ten, because his heart is pure Wimperis. And why shouldn't it be? Mr. Wimperis is an extremely clever writer who knows that if you lead a horse to the water it will generally drink. But not if you drive it there. It is the same with audiences, to whom this writer—not hindered by his collaborator, we feel sure—offers a well of natural and delightful sparkle.

Stage dialogue is meant to be spoken on the stage, and not conned in the study. " Where have you been hiding, dear? " says one Society cat to another. " I haven't, darling," purrs the other. " I've been everywhere that matters, but *it's nice to see you again!* " Is this witty? If not, it does just as well as wit at the moment, and that's the important thing. And to deny that the " roaring forties " is a latitude and maintain that it can only mean the last row in the chorus is very good indeed. Our authors are a little too fond of double meanings as between character and audience rather than between two personages. " You should press your suit," somebody will remark, and the disguised tailor will answer, " That's what I'm always doing." This is not really dramatic, since it leaves the interlocutor in the air. But it's a small fault.

The many characters who flit in and out of this play are all of them perfectly feasible and legitimate excursions into the grotesque, and they are capitally hit off by a very strong cast of players. There is a delightful valet in the first act—sleek, chubby, fatuous,

effeminate and preposterous. He has a ten minutes' turn, fades, and is no more seen. But when, two acts later, his master says, "I daren't dismiss Wichelow; *he would cry!*" and the whole house roars with laughter—well, then we realise first, that this is a dramatic stroke which has been in suspension for an hour and a half, and second, that Mr. Cyril Twyford's impersonation must have bitten deeper than we thought. We had entirely forgotten him, and a word brought him to life.

Mr. Morton Selten hardly needed to speak. He had just to be, and the corner of the room in which he was swarmed with all the vulgarities. This actor is always good, and his parvenu was a joy. Mr. George Elton made great fun of a retired Anglo-Indian—a Colonel Dudgeon. ("One of the Dudgeons of High Dudgeon, isn't he?" asked the young tailor innocently, which again is very near wit.) The actor looked like a cartoon by "Spy" of a peace-time "Bobs," and rattled on in a lingo composed entirely of *khitmagars*, *jemadars*, *mem-sahibs*, *punka-wallahs*, and the italicised words in Mr. Rudyard Kipling's ballads. Miss Isabel Jeans is coming on at a tremendous pace, and actually played a "vamp" without reducing the play to film level. Only an actress of great accomplishment could have said "Do you know Mr. . . . Bassett?" with so much politeness, yet with so sure an air of faltering before the socially non-existent. There were lots of other clever people about—Messrs. Ernest Hendrie, Ernest Milton, Tom Reynolds,

Arthur Cleave, and Ewart Scott ; Mesdames Dorothy Tetley, Lydia Bilbrooke, and Mabel Stewart.

But the whole thing centred in the tailor's assistant, who was Mr. Francis Lister. Now it is always being said that dramatic critics are uniformly wise after the event, that long after the managers have been tumbling over each other to secure such actresses as Miss Edith Evans and such plays as *The Conquering Hero*, and when the public is tired of expending itself in adulation, that then, and only then, we poor scribblers come along with our grudging admissions. Well, it may be so, and I suppose the fact that all my colleagues and I keep on shouting " Louise Hampton " at the top of our voices is the merest hallucination. Managers will, I suppose, have their usual crow over us about 1946.

I am not prepared to put up with any of this nonsense about Mr. Francis Lister. I said all I had to say of this exquisite actor two years ago, and put it in a printed book. And like a minute gun at sea, or anywhere else, I have been declaring him the best *jeune premier* in England with a monotonous persistence. But his range is not limited to this. He could play Robert Bassett just as well on his head as on his beautifully creased legs—his Ferdinand in *The Tempest* was a miracle of poetry and grace. Even in light comedy he has style, manner as distinct from that horrible thing manners, and is simple and unaffected. He can put more art and accomplishment into taking a " call " than most juvenile leads contrive throughout a whole piece. Perhaps he is a wee bit

short of a sense of fun, but no actor can have everything.

May I suggest that readers miss neither this play nor the player? They will probably never see him again in an ill-fitting brown suit with a blue waistcoat. There's genius for you!

April 13.

"This Marriage"

A Play by ELIOT CRAWSHAY WILLIAMS

Comedy Theatre

MR. WILLIAMS'S play lacks momentum. Momentum, my dictionary tells me, is "the quantity of motion in a moving body, proportioned to the quantity of matter multiplied into the velocity." More shortly, momentum is mass multiplied by speed. Emotional momentum, therefore, is the combination of the thing which happens and the person it happens to. The deafness of a Beethoven has more momentum than the lack of hearing in a composer of jazz; Othello's jealousy is a bigger thing than Dogberry's could have been. The characters in *This Marriage* endure throes which fail to agonise us, not because the throes lack excitement in themselves, but because the people who endure them are of insufficient account.

The pangs, *qua* pangs, are excellent, and indeed, have always been so considered by the best writers for study and stage. Take the scene in the second act in which the temptress seduces—the word is the author's—the good young man who is "fed up" with four years of domestic happiness. The whole point here

is surely not the naughty spectacle but concern for those who take part in it. Did anybody in the theatre really care what happened to Christopher Maitland? No; for there is involved here a principle unknown to mathematicians but familiar to the student of æsthetics —the non-increasability of nothing. Add emotion to nothing, and nothing remains. Pour "experiences" upon Christopher, and our backs are not wetted.

Compare Mrs. Mount's "betrayal" of Richard Feveral, and the momentum gathering with every word of that feverish colloquy. The woman has a case—or Meredith makes you think so. Virtuous people will not give her a housemaid's place: is she to receive the devil's wages without rendering him her services? Then come the direr things—imputations upon wives, and so forth. "This lovely outcast almost made him think she had the right on her side, so keenly her Parthian arrows pierced the holy centres of society, and exposed its rottenness."

But Yvonne Taylor pierced and exposed nothing, and had only to seek the nearest registry office to secure a place as parlourmaid. Mr. Williams gives Yvonne appetite without a mind, and the case which she puts up for passion is of the feeblest. No question here of gliding hand in hand into "silver infinity shaking over seas." Indeed, the woman tilts against magic, and would break a lance for a coarse universe "Take the world," she cries to her lover; "take it with all its faults and filthinesses." There is plenty of commonness in Yvonne. Does not her creator

make her look round Mrs. Maitland's drawing-room and say, " I'm not this class ! " She has, we feel, a talent for the word out of place, and will be capable, like Maupassant's *grisette*, of such phrases as " *Mon gros lapin adoré !* " She, too, will call her lover by the name of all the animals and vegetables in the " *Cuisinière bourgeoise*," or " Mrs. Beeton." But, with all her commonness, Yvonne has not the actuality of Mrs. Mount's admission as to her father—" A linen-draper, dear. He wears a white neck-cloth." Yvonne prefers the manner of Sir Austin Feverel, and we must listen to such aphorisms as " Conscience, isn't like a liver ; you can get on without it."

But the whole path to Mr. Williams's *dénouement* is paved with recollections of similar situations. Does Christopher inevigh against marriage ? The mind goes back to half-a-dozen novels by Mr. Wells. He, too, we seem to remember, has shown intrigue to be a magic casement opening upon perilous seas, with a shipwreck in the offing. Does Vera Maitland offer terms to Yvonne and expose so generous a heart that the baggage swims to the door on floods of repentance ? We remember Adeline Hulot : " Quand la vieillesse viendra, faites pénitence. . . . vous serez exaucée, si Dieu daigne entendre les prières d'une. . . ." Here Joséphа interrupted the Baroness. " D'une martyre, madame," she said, and kissed her robe. The pedant may object that the singer was no longer with Hulot, whom she had deserted for the duc d'Hérouville. One retorts that Yvonne was sufficiently bored with

Christopher, and that discarding him was only a matter of time.

These are merely the images evoked in the mind of one spectator by this rather dull play. For others, other fancies and reminiscences must have beguiled those four acts. You might have thought, if you had been so disposed, upon D'Annunzio's Silvia and Gioconda, or upon the two women in Mrs. Clifford's *The Likeness of the Night*, and been grateful, perhaps, to Mr. Williams for not suggesting that it is always the wife who is the dullard and the mistress who is the miracle of wit and inspiration. In this play they are all dullards, even Vera, though Miss Cathleen Nesbitt encased her in the chinkless armour of her personal sensitiveness. And I go back to my first point, which was that the people in this play can suffer no considerable injury because they themselves are inconsiderable.

But the Maitland triangle leaves us cold. More strictly speaking, it left me cold. I should fail in part of my duty if I did not record the fact that the house on the first night gave itself up to great enthusiasm after the second act. But whether this was intended for the play, or as a personal tribute to Miss Tallulah Bankhead, and in compensation for *Conchita*, I could not determine. Perhaps a little of both. The success of this act must, in any case, be attributed largely to the actress, who would however have made it easier for me to swallow the false heroics if she had not swallowed quite so many of her words. The producer should ask

Miss Bankhead to give value and meaning to syllables, and not to run three or four of them into one.

Miss Nesbitt made one accept the infeasible ending. There was no logical reason why Christopher should have fallen, sentimental and repentant, into Vera's arms. He will stray again ; she knows it ; and he knows that she knows. And it is difficult to conceive anything more unpleasant than a wife who manages her husband's intrigues behind his back, and little that is less likely to lead to a reconciliation. But the theatre was always the place for blessings on those fallings-out that make it up with tears. Only, you see, in the case of Christopher and Vera it never really came to a tiff.

Mr. Herbert Marshall, as the husband, was as pleasant as usual. Mr. Bromley Davenport, in the tiniest of parts, nearly shattered the play with his astonishing actuality. This also, as usual.

May 11.

"The Pleasure Garden"

A Play by BEATRICE MAYOR

The Stage Society

THIS is one of those pieces whose every moment is delightful but whose total gesture is misconceived. Its author is obviously a pessimist like the butler in Wilde's play, who took the wretchedest view of life, yet did his best to give satisfaction. Mrs. Mayor gives, in a series of scenes of great charm and delicacy, an interpretation of life almost Gummidgian in its darkness; her pleasure garden is a "wale," a pit, a slough of despond, or whatever simile our brightest may have discovered for their extremes of dejection. No community was ever quite so miserable as this, not even in Russia.

What is at the bottom of so much despair? Well, principally dying and being born, love and hate, desire, fulfilment, intoxication—all the things which are meat and drink to the artist, and make life worth while for the ordinary man.

When the curtain rises we see a number of people sitting under trees. It is a bright, sunny afternoon. A student is reading a work upon stalk-eyed crustacea.

On the form next to him an elderly gentleman is smoking a pipe. In the background an actor is "resting," and snoring. A young wife sews in the foreground. Then odds and ends of humanity drift on to the stage, and the play begins. A chit of a girl seeks the boy-lover whom she has driven to distraction; a husband and wife engage in as embittered and futile a quarrel as ever graced the pages of Mr. Wells; a poet despairs of his Muse and of his mistress without a mind; a rich woman bullies her maid; a distraught lady makes meaningless moan. This traffic rouses the student, who compares philosophies with the smoker and is persuaded to exchange for the rest of the afternoon the study of shell-fish for that of mankind.

The *va-et-vient* is resumed. A clergyman's wife meets a former schoolmate, now a courtesan. Both are miserable—one because passion has not entered her life, the other because her life has been wrecked by it. The actor wakes up and reveals a past as pretendedly inscrutable as he would have it romantic in a seedy, second-rate way. He is amorist and drunkard, and blabs his affairs to all and sundry. It now appears that the boy-lover and the courtesan are not, in Sir Arthur Pinero's phrase, strangers to one another. The young *ménage* totters, and the chit reveals unexpected depths of silliness and cruelty. The distraught lady—who has been a companion eleven times in fourteen years—opens an abyss of loneliness before our feet. The actor makes up to the courtesan. Two factory girls make a mock of the wander-wit. We see a mourner

on his way to a funeral. A child laughs. The student believes that all the world is mad and that only crabs are sane. But that, of course, is only because he knows so little about them. Those studies in humanity have shown us that, at least in Mrs. Mayor's view, *tout comprendre* is not necessarily *tout pardonner*. At the end there are only two happy people left—the man with the pipe, who is going to die, and the girl, because she is sewing the proverbial "little, little things."

The charm of the play comes from the author's very subtle sense of character, and her abounding fantasy and wit. Everything that she says about her people is true of them at some moment of their lives; it is the implication of continuity which is wrong. Produce these people, as the mathematicians say, even the shortest distance in their present moods, and you would land them all in the asylum. But as the companions of an hour they are delightful.

The play went throughout to an audible purr of content, and you could hardly believe that there was "not a penny in it." The acting was excellent, every member of the very long cast being quite perfect. There was not enough of Mr. Felix Aylmer, the man with the pipe. He alone kept one's nerves under control, and when he was not on the stage one felt like the sick man among Flaubert's pigmies, "downcast to see his little physician depart." Mr. Hay Petrie played the student in an ordinary brown suit and an extraordinary vein of charity. Mr. Richard Bird imparted beauty to the boy-lover. This actor is really

young and not, like so many *jeunes premiers*, merely rejuvenated. As the romantic actor, half gallant and half cad, Mr. Stephen Ewart was wholly admirable. He exuded self-pity, and tawdry, second-hand pathos—a grotesque full of humour. It is difficult to decide between Miss Mary Barton and Miss Athene Seyler, but if I must do so I give the palm to the latter for a straightforward, understandable success. Her part, you see, was as plain as a pikestaff or plainer ; and when it comes to seeing the nose on her character's face nobody can beat Miss Seyler. Her courtesan had a careless gaiety that sent a shudder down one's back, and a moment or two of lacerating pathos. Miss Barton dree'd her weird with faint, sad grace and an exquisite poignancy. It was not her fault that the character could not explain itself ; and her withdrawals into the half-night of madness, her feeble efforts to express unusual thought in shreds of commonplace phrases worn like counters, her hopelessness and resignation—all this was very fine. Miss Jean Cadell was good. Miss Marjorie Gabain and Miss Elsa Lanchester were amusing, and Miss Drusilla Wills, as a waitress, contributed a sketch which was perfectly true and, at the same time, amazingly funny. She disturbed the peace of the house, and I should really arraign her for " creating."

July 6.

"A Comedy of Good and Evil"

By RICHARD HUGHES

The Three Hundred Club

THIS was a baffling, provocative, and even irritating play, which for two acts was always on the point of becoming extremely good. One's interest was genuinely aroused; things were happening on the stage which only a writer with a keen sense of the theatre could have devised; things were being half-said which needed no more than an additional word to become explicit. Of these two acts one would suggest that the play did not mean anything, but seemed, rather, to wander round about a meaning. One was content to suspend judgment; confusion was perhaps not in the work, but in our minds. A dog with a luminous nose might, by his percipience, have lighted the way to an interpretation; we humans could but await a revelatory-third act. Darkness, however, prevailed to the end, and the ultimate illumination was to seek.

The play is a fantasy, compounded of mysticism

and satire, and set in a framework of rustic manners. When the curtain drew up it disclosed a Welsh clergyman, who was adding to his income by doing the washing for the summer visitors, and his wife, who already possessed a wooden leg and ardently desired a cat. There was a dull half hour here of frittering talk, enlivened by one single flash of wit : "They say that some of the English clergy are so rich, look you, that they can afford to live in their rectories instead of letting them." Then the clergyman discovered that he had lost the little gold cross from his watch-chain. At this point a scream was heard, and, on the door being opened, a child of some fourteen years was found in distress. The simple folk succoured her. But the Bible, at her touch, burst into flames, and the child cried out, "Blast you !" So the clergyman's wife knew her to be an evil spirit, and threatened to exorcise her with the Bible. And the child flew up the window curtains like a cat, and had to be coaxed down by the minister, who, on the principle of loving his enemies, gave her house room. This was the first act.

But it appears that this evil little spirit is not immune from backsliding, and upon occasion falls into good ways. So, in the night, she gives the clergyman's wife a new leg, with real flesh and one of Satan's silk stockings, which so scandalises the villagers that the local fishmonger, wearing a halo made out of an old straw hat, exorcises the demon-child with bell, book, and candle. That is the second act. The third act finds the clergyman dead. Satan's child holds a long

colloquy with the dead man's spirit, which has carried its metaphysical leanings beyond the grave. And now the fishmonger reappears in the guise of the vicegerent of Right. He wants the clergyman sent to Hell, presumably for having entertained a devil ; but the demon, still backsliding, insists upon giving him to Heaven. The wife, out of her simplicity, now persuades the emissary of Darkness that Good must conquer Evil in the end, and that she had better come over on to the winning side. This accomplished, the wife sits down to the harmonium, and the play is at an end.

Now what is there " behind " all this ? On the plane of material happenings there has been the good fun of calling people by their professions. This custom prevails in Germany, where a lady visitor will be announced as Mrs. Income-tax-Collector Schmidt. In certain parts of Lancashire the wife of the doctor is always known by her husband's profession, as, for instance, " Mrs. Dr. Smith." In this play we hear a great deal of Mrs. Jones Bakehouse and Mr. Gas Jones, a plumber. There has been the fun of the derangement of pronouns, such as calling the chairs and tables " she." There has been good fun at the expense of the villagers. So much for the rusticity of the play. Its satirical vein is shown by the wife's travail of spirit over that boon, at the Devil's hands, which so greatly exceeds her more reputable blessings. " Leg," she cries, " I have been but a poor body to you ! " Religion, in these villagers' minds, means something remote from

joy. Whereby this little village becomes the microcosm of the larger world.

Now, how about the mysticism? One might say, perhaps, that Welsh harps were insistently in the air, but that one could not make out the tune. The programme gave a clue: "For one must always be careful of distinctions." Does the play mean that Evil is only Good looked at from another angle? But that is an old story. Does not Shakespeare say somewhere that nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so? It is permissible to contend that the play is good enough without the attachment of any fixed and definite interpretative label. Perhaps our adventure should have been spiritual rather than intellectual. "It's faith you want, Minnie Williams," said one of the characters, "not understanding. She's no good to you at all."

One's understanding was soon out of action, and one left the theatre with a fine stock of unanswered questions. What did the loss of the little cross signify? Why did the wife desire a cat so insistently? Why did the child fly up the window curtains and crouch there like a cat? What, exactly, did the new leg symbolise? How did the fishmonger come by his halo and, later, by his knowledge of Latin? Was it, indeed, the fishmonger? Why was there so much talk of Mrs. Jones Bakehouse being eaten by a bear? The effect of the whole play was that of a triple challenge. First, to the eye and the theatrical sense of surprise, which were satisfied. Second, to the mind,

which remained unsatisfied. Third, to the mystic sense, as to which I cannot judge. To me the moon is the moon, and green cheese is green cheese, and never the twain shall be interchangeable.

There were two bad patches, technically speaking. The first was the long and tedious chit-chat of the opening scene, the second was the colloquy between the demon-child and the unseen spirit. Will playwrights note, please, that conversations with ghosts, ratiocinating inaudibly off-stage, can never be satisfactory? Be it said, however, that this not entirely successful piece was worth a great deal more than many intelligible, commonplace successes. There was obviously a mind at work at one end transmitting some sort of message. And I have already hinted that my receiving set may not have been in good order.

It was said of some actors venturing upon Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* that their reputation as torches should not suffer from the impenetrability of the fog. Mr. Leslie Banks as the clergyman, Miss Louise Hampton as the wife, and Miss Hermione Baddeley as the child did all that incandescence could do. But those who have driven by night in a thick mist will know that it is often better to put out the gig's lamps, and let your horse find his own way. This play probably reads better than it acts. I have written about it with the greatest diffidence and under any amount of correction. If another should hold that the whole thing was nonsense I might not quarrel with him.

July 13.

"Old English"

A Play by JOHN GALSWORTHY

Haymarket Theatre

THIS is not a new and *pukka* Galsworthy of the really exciting kind, but an adaptation of his short story, *The Stoic*. That excellent tale, it will be remembered, was about an octogenarian shipowner of Liverpool, who possessed, in addition to a fleet of merchant vessels, a remarkably stiff upper lip. Things had not gone too well with the old man. After sixty years of browbeating and bullying he found himself heavily in debt, his ownership dwindled to a managing director's interest, worth some two thousand a year, out of which he must allow his creditors thirteen hundred. He was saddled in addition with the widow and children of his illegitimate son, to whose support he contributed another three hundred a year. This left the old man a bare four hundred for himself, and one wondered how, on this pittance, he contrived to keep not only a manservant and an expensive cook, but a cellar full of Perrier-Jouet of a notable year, majestic port and adequate brandy.

And now the opportunity occurs to provide for his descendants. Heythorp's old friend, Pillin, wants to

quit the shipping business and indulge his hypochondria at leisure. Heythorp recommends his company to purchase Pillin's worthless old boats for sixty thousand pounds, in return for which Pillin gives him a secret commission of six thousand, settled on the children. By mischance a shady solicitor gets wind of the arrangement and blackmails the old man. Magnificently Heythorp orders his valet to "remove that hound." And realising that the game is up he eats and drinks himself into a fit of apoplexy.

At first sight you might say that there is no more here than the cornering of a pig-headed old swindler. But a character may take on something of the size of his creator, and we realise that whatever vices Mr. Galsworthy may choose to depict, they will not be petty ones. Heythorp's nickname in the city of Liverpool was "Old English," and we feel that he is to stand for the dominating—which is a better word than domineering—spirit of our race.

Other writers have been before Mr. Galsworthy in this business of magnification. We remember how Ibsen turned that defaulting industrialist, John Gabriel Borkman, into an eagle with a broken wing. Or you might say that Heythorp is Mr. Kipling's Sir Anthony Gloster all over again :

> Lord, what boats I've handled—rotten and leaky and old !
> Ran 'em, or—opened the bilge-cock, precisely as I was told.
> Grub that 'ud bind you crazy, and crews that 'ud turn you grey,
> And a big fat lump of insurance to cover the risk on the way.

Only, perhaps, old Heythorp preferred to live at home on the fat of the land and bamboozle the insurance companies when the boats went down. Mr. McKinnel gave an admirable performance and made the old man stern, unbending, and every bit as dour as the owner of the Mary Gloster. On the technical side the actor was quite perfect, the slowness of gesture being particularly good. Mr. Galsworthy is too great an artist not to seize upon any bit of beauty lurking even in an unpleasant character, and he gives old Heythorp some musings upon the England of his youth which are exquisite. The days of the four-in-hand, of smart cabs and smarter " tigers," of Jorrocks, of little Robson the actor, of Mario and Grisi and the old dear, dead, forgotten Italian Opera—all are gone, and the old man who remembers them must be going too.

One might perhaps venture on a criticism here. It is quite impossible to think of jollity, old English or otherwise, in connection with Mr. McKinnel's grim ruin of a man. This Heythorp never kept a cab, never hunted, and could never, at any time of his life, have told one tune from another. The Heythorp of the written story was something otherwise. He was one of those gay old dogs who, as Stevenson said, go on bubbling with laughter through years of man's age compared to which the valley at Balaklava was as safe and peaceful as a village cricket green on Sunday. I cannot bring myself to suggest that Mr. McKinnel bubbles. His Heythorp is a grisly fellow who, though he may not think on his end, makes everybody in the

theatre think on it. Mr. Allan Aynesworth, or Mr. Fred Kerr, would have looked the part better, though lacking, perhaps, something of ferocity. I suggest that the author has set any actor an impossible task in asking him to present a commercial Coriolanus in the envelope of Squire Western. Mr. McKinnel had to choose between the rubicund and the Stygian, and he chose the all-black. As Sir Anthony Gloster he was very fine indeed.

That entirely satisfying actor, Mr. H. R. Hignett, was life-like in his impersonation of the valetudinarian who deems an impaired constitution a poor reward for not having, as Old Adam puts it, applied hot and rebellious liquors, nor woo'd the means of weakness and debility. It is time somebody snubbed these sanctimonious old fellows, though for this particular playwright to do it is rather like Samuel Smiles rebuking Father William. Mr. Reginald Bach, as Sir Anthony's son Dickie, was shiningly innocuous, and Mr. Lawrence Hanray was quite horribly credible as the nasty solicitor. Mr. Charles Maunsell was exceedingly effective in two tiny parts. Heythorp's daughter, a mixture of Regan and Geraldine Ridgeley in Sir Arthur Pinero's play, was well and duly hated by the audience from her first word to her last. On looking into my programme to find out the name of this unknown actress with a flair for the odious, I read "Adela Heythorp—Louise Hampton." Either I am not to believe this, or a fine and gracious actress has even more versatility than I gave her credit for. Miss Irene Rooke was

rather wanly amusing, and Miss Joan Maude was pleasant.

But the act in which the last two ladies appeared was a very tedious affair, serving no purpose except to give the blackmailing lawyer his clue, which could have been done in a sentence. The play is essentially one of two parts, and two parts only—the act of malfeasance and the escape from retribution. The scene displaying the home life at Millicent Villas merely serves to show that to Mr. Galsworthy's great gifts that of the minor pleasantries, *à la* Ian Hay, has not been added. And I should find it difficult to meet the objection that the guzzling exhibition at the end is not amusing. It is certainly not edifying, and in a very small voice I would suggest that it is just the least little bit vulgar.

October 26.

"The Hayling Family"

A Tragedy by ALLAN MONKHOUSE

The Play Actors

EDMOND DE GONCOURT has a passage worthy of the attention of every serious student who cannot understand why so many "intellectual" plays should be ineffective on the stage. He is tilting at Zola's demand for a realistic theatre :

> For elaborate research, or thorough-going dissection, for the creation of real and illogical human beings, I see only the novel. . . . Zola takes into too little account that cardboard box of conventions which is the theatre, that mountebank's stage whereon the grotesque niggardliness of Molière's l'Avare attains to a visual conviction beyond the reach of Balzac's more human miser, Old Grandet.

The key to this passage is the word "visual"—the actual French being "ce tréteau enfin, sur lequel l'avarice *bouffe* de l'Avare de Molière arrive au point juste de l'optique."

In other words, the intellectual playwright must consent to his medium. He must make his psychological and dramatic clocks strike the hour together.

This is where Mr. Monkhouse, in this play, fails. Hayling, a magnanimous scroundrel, is hauled off to prison. Dramatically we ache for the curtain to come down, but we must wait for the psychological climax. Each member of the family—wife, sons, daughter, and even the daughter's fiancé—has yet to explain his or her reaction to the calamity which has come upon the family.

Mrs. Hayling must explain that she is a hard woman who sees in her husband's punishment the wrath of God, and renew an old lament that her children have outgrown her. But there is nothing visually, *i.e.*, theatrically, effective here. She should have bewailed and bemoaned hereafter. It is the same with all the others, who now talk that kind of sensitive stuff which, Goncourt insists, demands the facilities, the accommodations and the leisure of the novel. They are, so to speak, behind the clock. Granted that Old Hayling is as much superior in intellectual subtlety to Mr. Galsworthy's Old Heythorp as Grandet is to Harpagon, the fact remains that he does not "get over" with one hundredth part of the success of the commoner creation. Let me say here that Mr. Herbert Waring did wonders with him.

Mrs. Hayling is a part for Duse. Her tragedy is one to glimmer out of an actress's eyes and tremble among the hollows of her cheeks. Miss Edyth Olive is not a Duse, though she put up a brave fight against a part which would baffle any living actress I can think of. The young men had a bad time of it. The difficulty is that Mr. Monkhouse will project his own

mind into his characters, and that his mind is too subtle, too introspective, and too self-torturing for healthy, tennis-playing young men to lay claim to as their own. *On the stage* they cannot make that claim good. Take John, who is most uncomfortably like the Shelley of the early, priggish days. John's father has just murdered John's mother, which fills their son with such understanding pity that he is not even annoyed with Hayling. His sister reminds him that their mother is dead, and John replies, " My father is living. He wants me. He wants all of us. This is a living man—a miserable man. It's his time of need." Note how John must drag in "all of us"—the "family" *motif*. Even when, earlier on, Mrs. Hayling had threatened to murder her husband, John was not unduly perturbed. He told his mother that he understood her point of view, but, turning to his father, he declared that all would be well " if you, sir, will become as a little child." Then, wagging a forefinger at his unhappy progenitors, he told them that this was " their chance."

Here Mr. Monkhouse forestalls our rejection of so much sweetness and light—perhaps John is more like Matthew Arnold than Shelley—by rebuking brother John out of brother Bobby's mouth. " You would be a great man if you were not a fool. You ought to have been a preacher. You'd have a great success if you had no facts before you." Mr. John Wyse is a good, perhaps a very good, actor in the making, and he played John with great sensitiveness and tact, but looked about ten years too young. As Bobby Mr.

Frederick Cooper was entirely miscast. I am told that nobody could be found to accept what was considered a thankless *rôle*, which would seem to show that our younger players have as little discernment as some of their elders. The part is one of extraordinary spiritual shyness tucked away in a gay envelope, and would very perfectly have suited Mr. Robert Harris. Mr. Cooper gallantly stepped into the breach, and proffered that quality of light-hearted impertinence which was so right in *Outward Bound*, and so wrong here. This Bobby could never have spouted Shakespeare, or countered John with "ineffectual angel"! However, Mr. Cooper made an undoubted hit with the audience, unhampered by a conception founded on the written play.

But individual members were submerged, beyond possibility of acting success, by this tyrannical preoccupation with the idea of the family. One thought of Arnold's—

> Like children bathing on the shore
> Buried a wave beneath.
> The second wave succeeds, before
> We have had time to breathe.

It was, so to speak, "their funeral." And death by drowning, however lenitive to the principal actor, is tedious to the looker-on. The sole fault of this play is that it ought to have been a novel. We cannot doubt which medium Goncourt, who was both novelist and dramatist, would have chosen for its theme.

November 2.

"Guilty Souls"

A Drama by ROBERT NICHOLS

The Three Hundred Club

IN a long preface to the printed play Mr. Nichols enjoins upon us respect for the younger generation and contumely for the old. "During the time I was in England," he declares, "I never met a man over forty who was in any sense a citizen of to-day." And again:

> The landscape in England is simply littered with skeletons of extinct institutions. To live in England is like trying to live in a house which has a corpse sitting in state in each room—and every man-jack of a corpse attended by several hundred elderly courtiers, who introduce you to it and bid you shake it by the hand and obey something it was said to have said to their fathers sixty years ago in a different house.

This may be post-war nerves or mere petulance. Whichever it is, it belongs to that order of persuasion which can only praise A by running down B. Well, young men will be young men, one supposes, and Mr. Nichols tells us that he is twenty-eight. But to insist that Mr. Wells is a great master because Mr. Bennett is addle-pated, or *vice versâ*, is the criticism of eighteen.

This preface is, despite its cleverness, altogether too young.

Guilty Souls was written, we are told, to deepen consciousness, to set up reverberations whereby the author might learn whether, in his rediscovery of religion, he stood alone.

> We must wager on the existence or non-existence of God ; if He exists for us His commands exist for us and we must serve Him . . . and if He exists not, we must take the responsibility of doing exactly what we like, being perfectly prepared to commit any crime, care we to do so, since to refuse is to prove ourselves irrational and cowardly. To this extent, then, I wish to make the play a touchstone.

Rien que ça ! we murmur. At the same time we are warned that the play should be judged " sheerly as a work of art." The demand is unreasonable. The very essence of a play with a thesis is that we shall consider that thesis. *St. Joan* would be a poor work of art if it did not invite us to consider and debate within ourselves whether the burning was good or bad sense, politics, or religion. The guiltiest soul in this play is driven by his conscience to ask whether a sinner shall purchase remission of his sin by public confession, ineffective in the way of restitution, effective only in the wrecking of three innocent lives. The answer of the play is not that the sinner may or shall, but that he must. How, with every fibre of one's being in revolt against a doctrine showing Divinity so much less merciful than

Man—how, one asks, is it possible to assume the detachment necessary to purely æsthetic consideration?

Aiming at such detachment one might say that this play is top-heavy, improbable, prolix, and dull. The first act, which lasts one whole hour, plays like inferior Galsworthy and merely sets forth the juggling of two solicitors with two deed boxes. You foresee a police court scene, and the dull meanderings of melodrama. Whereas the play is concerned, in essence, with the juggling of two souls with conscience. Here again, as pure art, the piece might be considered ineffective. Indeed, it was bound to be so. Not even Ibsen, the greatest technician of the modern theatre, always succeeded in safeguarding the feet of those who kept their heads so magnificently in symbolic cloudland. Why did Hilda urge the old gentleman, whom she liked, to climb the steeple from which he must obviously fall? Why did Ella Rentheim encourage John Gabriel Borkman, whom she loved, to catch his death of cold? People don't do such things on the material plane, and even Ibsen's perfected genius could not always redeem absurdity.

And this is Mr. Nichols's first play. One guilty soul is made to fill the *rôle* of conscience to the other. He is at the same time a butler who lays the table for dinner, so that you never quite know which of the two the master of the house is addressing. And when the master threatens his man with a revolver, is he trying to rid his establishment of a material blackmailer, or would he merely stifle the voice of conscience? The butler declares that no bullet can hurt him. But when

the master has purged his bosom by confession the butler kills himself with that same innocuous bullet because fulfilled confession sets conscience free.

But the abstract plane was another pair of shoes. First you had to divest your mind of the idea that this was a play about normal beings whose nerves would be put right by a few rounds of golf. Then you had to put the æsthetic aspect on one side and come to intellectual grips with the theme. Last of all you had to enter the consciousness of one whose mind works not by reason but by faith. These battles won on your side of the curtain, victory on the other jumped to the eyes. Mr. Claude Rains, one of the very finest actors we have, was superb throughout, and never faltered once though his ecstasies of spiritual torture were interlarded with such difficulties as "I suppose there's a fire in the drawing-room?" Mr. Ernest Milton was duly horrible as Butler-Conscience, and Miss Dorothy Holmes-Gore moved everybody as a pale-faced novice. Miss Muriel Pratt, too, played more than intelligently. Indeed, only very clever brains could have won through on a stage littered with recumbent penitents like the end of an Elizabethan tragedy. Mr. A. E. Filmer, the producer, is to be congratulated upon a setting which triumphed over such difficulties as a giant crucifix flanked by the mundanities of telephone and waste-paper basket. Altogether an evening of violent revolt and compelling interest. The play is one of the cleverest intellectual achievements of the younger school.

November 23.

"Dear Father"

A Comedy by MICHAEL ARLEN

The Play Actors

Il semble que les Anglais prennent trop de liberté, et que les Françaises n'ent prennent pas assez.—Voltaire.

THE case, one supposes, for Mr. Arlen's play is that it is an extravaganza on the theme of modern behaviour. And we recall Lamb's defence of the earlier comedy of bad manners : " I am the gayer for it." Lamb goes on to declare that if one of Congreve's or Wycherley's personages be placed in a modern play his virtuous indignation " shall rise against the profligate wretch as warmly as the Catos of the pit could desire." Then follow these significant words : " Because in a modern play I am to judge of the right and the wrong."

It has always seemed to me that Charles got his time factor all askew. Were not the playgoers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries judges of the right and the wrong ? Surely, if there is to be question of morality then the standard of morals must be the contemporary one. The correct defence of *The Country Wife* is not that playgoers had to wait a

hundred years for its sting to be drawn, but that the play was a true portrait of a handful of the English people of that day, and that neither subject nor treatment revolted the playgoing conscience of the time. It will be no defence of such plays as *Our Betters* and *The Vortex* to protest that a hundred years hence some critic will exhaust all the charm remaining to the English language to prove that Messrs. Maugham and Coward did not mean what they said. The proper questions to ask will be : Were these plays true to the tiny coteries with which they dealt ? Did they revolt twentieth century taste ? The answer to the first question will be Yes, to the second No. We dread no infection to-day from these " scenic representations of disorder," for the simple reason that disorder is shown to be what it is. Lady George Grayston and Florence Lancaster are held up not for admiration, but for obloquy. We are judges of the right and the wrong, and it is to the second category that we consign these wilful ladies.

Mr. Arlen's *Dear Father* is up another street, and the plea that our grandchildren may come to accept it as a piece of airy nonsense is inadmissible. Nonsense it may perhaps be ; the point is that the surrounding air is, in Hamlet's phrase, " a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours." It may be argued that Mr. Arlen's characters are not more venal or more silly than those in the two plays mentioned above. Agreed. But every piece of writing possesses, and cannot escape possessing, something which is the sum of all its

implications. The total gesture of Mr. Maugham's and Mr. Coward's plays is that there is another and a better world outside the vicious circles of their castigating. Mr. Arlen's gesture is to the contrary effect. "This is the world of to-day," it would seem to say, "and of all worlds it is the best possible."

Never, in Mr. Arlen's piece, do you hear the crack of the satirist's whip, and not once is the back bared to the lash. An English father who meets his daughter's moral lapses with facetiousness so gross that I cannot reproduce instances, and who, moreover, takes concern in her behaviour only in so far as it affects his son-in-law's proposals for blackmail—such a father is too vile a scapegoat for me to be the gayer for him. I have used the word scapegoat because it is just what this father ought to be painted and is not. He bears neither his own nor anybody else's sins. He should be shown as a vicious exception, whereas we are asked to take him as the ordinary good fellow. And I, for one, will not consent.

I suppose it might be argued that in this piece the family is not violated because there is no idea of the family, that marriage is not attacked "for affection's depth and wedded faith are not of that soil." But here, exactly, is the danger. Let there be no misunderstanding. I do not condemn this piece because its characters are immoral. Licentiousness has a place in art, but it must be shown for what it is. Mr. Arlen's people are not shown for what they are, and I protest with all reasonable vigour against the implication that

the father's indolent detachment is normal, that the daughter's capriciousness is the best of womanliness, that the family in this country is in a state of disintegration, that marriage has become a temporary affair of the body and not an enduring state of the affections. To the general mass of English life this play is untrue, and it contains no hint that it is a satire at the expense of the exceptions. If I were undertaking Mr. Arlen's defence I should plead imperfect assimilation of English niceties both of speech and mind. The verbal transgressions of taste are more than accidental ; they are the pith and marrow of the piece, and betray a way of thought which makes the worst of two civilisations.

Mr. Herbert Marshall must not mind if I deem his assumption of the cad to have been as ineffective as his postulated middle age. This actor's mind is not indelicate, and his pretences did not deceive. Miss Isabel Jeans tried hard to give gracelessness a touch of genius. The best impersonations were those of two admitted vulgarians, well played by Messrs. H. St. Barbe West and G. H. Mulcaster. As a snobbish butler Mr. Hignett was more Wellingtonian than ever, and as a drunken virago Miss Olga Slade was excellent. This, at least, was a portrait of honest dirt, and, as such, was singularly refreshing.

November 30.

"The Vortex"

A Play by NOEL COWARD

Everyman Theatre

LIKE the lady of fashion, your theatre manager is always declaring that he has nothing to put on. Well, here is a piece which is the *dernier cri* in the theatrical mode, "un peu schoking," perhaps, but no less popular on that account. It has a cast of moderate size, and as for setting, its demands are exorbitant only in the way of good taste. The reception of the piece was as extravagant and sincere as any author would desire, and I should not be surprised to learn that on the following morning Mr. Coward had to engage a secretary to help him to turn down the offers. But could no West End manager foresee that the piece could not fail? And will none of those now so sorely disappointed ones commission this very clever young playwright to prepare a new piece specially for him? Must the risks accepted by these gentry always be the absurd ones? Brains must ultimately come by their own, even in the theatre; and Mr. Coward has brains to spare.

The first act is a shimmer with wit of the best

theatrical kind—the non-literary sort that has to be spoken in the situation. The milieu is that of *Our Betters*, without the Americans. Into this viciously-silly and crazily-perverted minority, which makes a noise entirely disproportionate to its numbers, importance or influence, comes one Nicky Lancaster, who has been finishing his schooling in Paris. He finds his mother languishing on the breast of Tom Veryan, a sturdy young Guards officer—a " tame cat," in Sir Arthur Pinero's old phrase. Nicky is himself tarred with the degenerate brush. He dopes, his tongue takes the convenient path of the superlative, and is familiar with the " too adorable," " too divine," " too perfectly marvellous," which have taken the place of the " too utterly utter " of the 'nineties.

But Nicky is not " too foul." He has some notion of decency, and is in love with a comparatively " nice " girl, one Bunty Mainwaring. There is this to be said for Bunty—that she is a frank little savage, who likes to be a-moral, but does not believe in giving vice a halo. And now it appears that Bunty and Veryan are, again to use Sir Arthur's phraseology, not strangers to one another. This is a pretty kettle of fish, even for a young man of 1924, to come home and find that his sweetheart's former lover is the *amant en titre* of his mother. The scene of the discovery is as good a bit of theatre as I have seen for a long time. It might be just disagreeable, but Mr. Coward, by a stroke of pure genius, lifts it into the region of philosophic comment. Nicky is by way of being a pianist, and he

covers up his mother's outburst of jealousy with a crescendo of discordant jazz. You feel that he will go to his mother by and by.

And so he does. The third act is a very fine piece of work. Florence has offended not only the boy's father, but the boy himself. Yet Nicky is not all denunciation ; the century has altered. He tells his mother how he has watched her jig, amble, and lisp, and forces her to a confession. But he is no severe judge, and would understand wantonness. Has his mother a case ? She has, but it is a wretched one, and the boy tears it to pieces. It will be all different in the morning, he knows, but let them look truth in the face for one night. He loves her, and if she be but the least bit desirous to be blessed he'll blessing beg of her. And as he lays his sobbing head upon his mother's knees the curtain comes down.

There is the imprint of truth upon this play. These creatures are nauseating as animalculæ in a pond, but they interest. The craftsmanship is beyond reproach, and the dialogue is taut and spare, and of an admirable *vraisemblance*. The piece was magnificently acted. First by Mr. Coward, who lived the part with his nerves, and was so life-like that you seemed to be in the same room with him. Next by Miss Lilian Braithwaite, who gave a display of comic artifice and emotional power far in excess of anything she has been allowed to do for a very long time. Why should this clever actress be so often condemned merely to simper and pour out tea ? Miss Molly Kerr, with her vanity,

and her sleek aristocratic head prepared for the mob's guillotine, was admirable ; while Mr. Kinsey Peile and Mr. Bromley Davenport, each in his so different way, was perfect. Only Miss Millie Sim was not quite right in her suggestion of the chorus.

I have four criticisms to offer. The caricature of the well-known novelist is offensive, and should be deleted. The third act is too long, there is too much piano playing in the second, and ladies do not exhale cigarette smoke through the nose.

December 7.

"The Man with a Load of Mischief"

A Play by ASHLEY DUKES

The Stage Society

A CUNNING way with a *confrère* whom, out of jealousy or simple brotherly hate, you are desirous not to praise, whilst retaining the mask of compliment, is to say that his piece is well written. Lest I be thought guilty of an old trick, I shall say at once that not only is *The Man With a Load of Mischief* exquisitely written, but also that its stage performance provided three glad hours, and it seemed not an hour of delicious entertainment. Was there a plot to this highly-mannered comedy of high manners? One cared not, content to lean back in one's stall and watch elegant personages do dialectical battle against an imbroglio which "means not, but blunders round about a meaning." The phrase is, I think, Pope's; and Pope, if he had owned a heart instead of a brain, might have written this comedy. You lean back, I repeat, content to take delight in the feint and counter of this prose, to watch each character putting up, if I may so express myself, his admirable Dukes.

"Blunders" is an ugly word, and "meanders" shall be substituted. There is doubtless, care we to search for it, a pens-ink-and-paper meaning to this piece. A royal and gouty Prince of the days before railways returns from the gambling saloon where he has won his courtiers' money to find that his mistress, with bag and that baggage which is her maid, has fled him. On her coach-horses' heels rides a Nobleman who would throw bad money after good, or, shall I say, send the Prince's indifferent mistress to rejoin his perfectly good guineas? The reasons for this magnanimity are not too clear. There is talk of a fine gesture and something about levellers and the entertainment to be derived from their rancour. The nobleman's valet is a Jacobin in whose breast that pretty parasite, a Prince's lady, may be supposed to arouse the extreme of resentment. So at this roadside inn, to which the quartet repairs, Man is offered by his master the luxury of seeing this gilded plaything humbled. More even, Man shall be the instrument of humiliation. And in a day or so Nobleman will send the lady back to her Prince with his card and a compliment. In the meantime Maid will beguile Nobleman's *ennui*.

But the plan miscarries, for the lady turns out to be a creature of the finest sensibility, and the man to be pure poet. Man demands that the lady shall give him more than she has given any of her lovers, and Lady, believing now what her heart has ceased to whisper, that greater gift is hers than mere marketable delight, falls into Man's arms. At daybreak they are away, and

Nobleman is left to foot the bill for lodging, and to await an angry Prince lumbering in pursuit, his face wine-red among the chariot cushions.

Well, that's the not very intelligible story, as nearly as it can be written down. But a play is not evidence, and in the theatre you do not call for the absurd reduction. Mr. Dukes's plot is, as a very dandified writer has put it, "just so much to him as to the decorative artist is inilluminate parchment, the form of a white vase, or the surface of a wall where frescoes shall be." A play must be about some literal thing just as parchment, vase, and wall must acknowledge material service. But the artist may be largely indifferent to the literal and material consideration; there is a surface to cover, and beauty is his preoccupation. In common hands Mr. Dukes's plot would have yielded nothing beyond a common intrigue. This playwright has dealt with it as your decorative artist will deal with the spout of a teapot, or your tattooist with a sailor's arm; he has covered it with rare and wonderful traceries and designs. Take the passage:

> NOBLEMAN: So there's adventure, Charles—the edge of life, the day's reward. Who would have guessed our fate this morning? Two nodding horses, two nodding horsemen, and the fortune of the road. How many milestones have I passed to-day—and each of them the grave of an hour lost in travelling! How many crazy loads of hay, and rosy farmers in their market-carts, and great full-bellied cornstacks, and feathered elms like striding cockerels! I was

> sick of meadowsweet and buttercups, I was surfeited with rich acres. The world is very coarse : Nature disgusts me. And yet our poets sing of her ! This strapping wench, this milkmaid of a goddess, all breasts and fruition ! A clownish taste. You spoke, Charles ?

There's a speech, for the chance of delivering which your popular actor would surely bate one of his several hundred weekly pounds. Yet I do not find it perfect. That delighted apprehension of Nature and drenched sense of her which appears in "feathered elms like striding cockerels" marches ill with the idea of surfeit in the following line. Let me take a better passage.

> Man : A world of appearance, says my lord—a painted mockery. Brave men, gay women—these are masks and shadows. Green trees, young shoots, high nests for crows—whispers, fancies. Bright mornings, quiver of the sunlight, falling dusk—darkness and dreams. This is an earth that men have made. Our stench corrupts the meadows, and the cattle hold their breath. This is an earth that men have made. All is appearance, says my lord, and smiles again—the smile that freezes laughter. If we are false, what can be true ? And yet the folded leaf will open to the sun. The tallest tree will cast the longest shadow. The longest shadow is reality.

This is exquisite, and the repetitions please the ear as the recurrences in a wallpaper of fine taste delight the eye. Yet it's not perfect either. Beginning with "If we are false," the rest is accidental blank verse.

Better, I suggest, is :

> MAN : You and I know the ring of emptiness. We have lived long enough without each other. Yesterday was empty, to-morrow may be empty, to-day is full. The earth is round about us. The young corn sleeps standing in the mist, and the fern-owl lies awake. The dew falls on trembling leaves, and the sheep are thick in the fold. This inn where we have met is wrapped in stillness—this house of ticking thoughts, this house of whispering passions, this house of dreams that stir the face of night. Words die in empty corridors ; our natures live. You are mine already, as I am yours. We are held in one embrace.

Here we forgive the solitary iambic for the carol sense of the sheep, and the admirable " words die in empty corridors." The latter phrase, as Mr. Quartermaine said it, seemed to annihilate whole generations of futile dealers in words, words, words. Did I not say that this play is exquisitely written ?

Decorative phrase-making, however, is not all the play, or you could extract its essence from the printed book. There's the visual theatre here, well-devised costume—which is another thing from the familiar scourings of old wardrobes—and a casement implicit of night and the stars to which Man pours out his Hamlet-like soul. Mr. Dukes called in Mr. Aubrey Hammond here, who, seeing eye to eye, made *décor* and dresses not so much adjuncts to, as part of, the play. These fine artists are, I understand, to visit

America. Let not that Continent to these twin minds admit impediment !

The part of Hamlet—for there are two Princes of Denmark in this piece—was shared by Mr. Allan Jeayes and Mr. Leon Quartermaine. Mr. Jeayes's Nobleman might have been labelled "the first blackguard in Europe." It was admirably in period, and I can think of no other actor who could have rendered so perfectly the suavity of essential corruption. Will Mr. Jeayes allow me to suggest that he has only to add repose to his other masteries to become a very fine actor indeed ? He must have crossed and uncrossed his legs a hundred times. Mr. Quartermaine's Man made but two gestures throughout the evening. For the rest of the time he stood stock still, motionless as a distant waterfall. And the waters were pure poetry. Miss Laura Cowie endowed the Lady with an exquisite Tudor face and an ageless refinement of being, and Miss Eileen Beldon was the soul of pertness. The Prince appeared not, but his coach rumbled magnificently off-stage. The piece is to be done in Berlin, with music. Would that it were to be re-done here, with kettledrums or without.

December 14.

"The Jeffersons"

A Comedy by VINCENT DOUGLAS

Regent Theatre

TRUTH is a shy goddess, given to veiling her face. But when, from time to time, she consents to a public appearance in the theatres of the West End of London it is the public, alas, which modestly stays at home. Three recent pieces, numbering Truth among their *dramatis personæ*, have been almost complete failures in town.

And now comes a fourth piece which has verisimilitude in every line—*The Jeffersons*. This is a comedy of Lancashire life, and it was received into the instant favour of the audience at the Regent Theatre. But that audience is definitely not what one calls "West End." It refuses to pay more than seven shillings, including entertainment tax, for a stall, and it rejoices in a two-shilling and even an eighteen-penny upper circle, and a shilling gallery. It is an entirely human audience, and bears cheerfully with the facts that at these prices it is deprived of listening to the disentangleable woes of shingled ladies with two thousand a year pin-money and no children. It liked *The Jeffersons* as,

for the past seven years, audiences all over provincial England and the whole of Australia and New Zealand have liked it. I liked the play, too, very much indeed, but have no doubt of the immensity of its failure with a West End audience.

What can they know of Lancashire who only London know? I beg leave to make a personal explanation here, which is not without bearing on this play. I was brought up in such a cotton mill as Mr. Jefferson owns in this piece, and could to-day earn a living as a four-loom weaver. I *know*, as no Londoner can know, how true Jefferson is. Let me repeat two little stories, one of which Southerners may not know, while the other has never been told. A Lancashire millowner lost his wife. A friend, calling to condole, was invited to view the deceased. "She looks well," he said. "Ah should think hoo (she) does look well," replied the husband, warmly; "hoo'd just 'ad six weeks at Blackpool!" He was determined that outlay of hard-earned money should have some reward. The second incident is within my own experience. A weaver was caught in some belting, and they wrapped the poor body up in the millowner's calico before taking it away. Relatives proffered thanks. "Thanks be blowed!" roared the manufacturer. "It'll be a shilling!"

Upon a relish for the traits of character exposed here depends appreciation of this piece. When the millowner says to his disobedient daughter, "Come 'ere, willt 'a, when Ah tell thee!" you feel beneath the slow incisiveness an inheritance of paternal authority almost Jewish in its intensity.

Such a passage of arms as :

MRS. JEFF (*romantic*) : Love is greater than money.

JEFF (*truculent*) : How much dost tha know about money ?

MRS. JEFF (*weakly*) : Not much.

JEFF : Then shut up about it, willta ?

has all the passion of Zola's *L'Argent*, or one of Balzac's epics of the Bourse. All Nucingen is in that demand to shut up. Your average Lancashire comedian covers up with a Lancashire accent humour common alike to Wiltshire and to Durham, and thinks that to use " teem " for " pour " and " clem " for " starve " is all. Jefferson in this play is different. He belongs to a universe with a twenty-mile radius, of which Manchester—with the accent on the second syllable—is the hub. John Bright is at one end of the Jefferson scale ; the mindless loonies of George Formby are at the other. " We are not cotton spinners all," was an old cry. " Thank God some of us still are ! " is the proper retort.

What matter if the play is our old friend the Montague-Capulet quarrel all over again ? What matter if an " accelerator placed on the shaft of each loom to make it go twice as fast " would smash every warp in the shed ? It is Jefferson who matters, and Mr. Wilfred Shine is immense. What matter again if Jefferson is outside the sphere of metropolitan sweetness and light ? There is a world elsewhere, as Coriolanus remarked. There Jefferson " belongs," and so, too, does the present ineffectual writer.

December 14.

Melodrama

"The Fake"

A Play by FREDERICK LONSDALE

Apollo Theatre

THIS is just the play to show our American visitors. Your Englishman is always suspected of dearly loving a lord, and the author has not shrunk from exposing the lengths to which one of his countrymen will pursue that foible. Towards the end, just as we are getting a little tired of the lickspittle, and feel inclined to protest that he is not fairly representative, up bobs Mr. Godfrey Tearle and tells him to his face that he is a murderer, and, what is worse, a cad, and, what is worse still, a fake, which is very brave of Mr. Tearle, considering that Mr. Allan Jeayes, judging by appearances, can give him a stone. But perhaps the outspoken hero has the longer reach.

Ernest Stanton (Mr. Jeayes) loved not only lords, but their second sons. So much so that when Gerald Pillick (Mr. Franklyn Bellamy), the second son of an earl, proposes for the hand of his daughter Mavis, Stanton throws her into his arms, notwithstanding the fact that the fellow is an obvious little bounder who boasts that he doesn't like his mother. Incidentally,

Stanton is a rubber merchant, on whose plantation—do they plant rubber, or is it of the macaroni order?—among whose indiarubber trees Gerald has worked for two years under the control of one Geoffrey Sands, Stanton's manager (Mr. Tearle). But does Stanton wire to Sands for Gerald's character? No. He hurries on the marriage, fearful of any discovery which should prevent him from becoming related to a peer.

The play opens just after the wedding breakfast. There is some talk of the Jayne-Misquith order (see *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*) between the family friend and the family's medical attendant, and then Mr. Jeayes appears, bland and imposing as the Bush building. With him, as they say in the courts, his secretary, Mr. Francis Lister. Both actors were very warmly received, as, too, were Miss Helen Haye, the family friend's wife, and Miss Henrietta Watson, the neglected mother of Mavis. One could perfectly well understand the applause which greeted the entrance of these distinguished players. What was, perhaps, a little remarkable was the welcome extended to Miss Muriel Alexander, who played the daughter. The audience couldn't really know that this young actress was going to act very, very well indeed. Can it have been that if the Englishman loves a lord, the Englishwoman cannot resist a bride? Then the Hon. Gerald sidled in with the air of a defaulting cashier who has been summoned to the office, and, finally, from the Back of Beyond, Mr. Godfrey Tearle made his tweeded entry. "They've got a wedding on, sir," protested the

footman, aghast at the absence of the tall hat and morning coat. " Thanks for the warning ! " said Mr. Tearle with that air of humorous gloom like an undertaker cracking a joke in the family vault. Sands beards Stanton and tells him that his son-in-law both drugs and drinks. " I don't believe it ! " says Stanton. " You will ! " retorts Sands as the curtain comes down.

In the next act, six years later, it appears that Gerald was addicted to a vice worse than drink—cruelty. He had made Africa too hot to hold him, and now practises his tricks upon Mavis and their little boy. But Stanton will not allow his daughter to leave the brute. Further, he insists that she shall accompany her husband on a tour round the world, though the doctor warns him that this will probably kill Mavis. Stanton, you see, has become a noble lord himself, and Gerald says that if there is any attempt to divorce him he will (a) cite the young secretary as co-respondent and (b) let a lot of unpleasant cats out of Stanton's bag. Fortunately, Sands is on hand in this act, as, indeed, is everybody else, and takes Gerald away for a seaside holiday. He spends a fortnight with him, trying to persuade the wretch to throw himself over the cliffs at St. Margaret's Bay. He won't, and so Sands poisons him, arranging that it shall look like suicide, and tells Stanton all about it as soon as the coroner's jury has found for a state of insanity. He dares Stanton to ring up Scotland Yard. " You daren't," he says in effect, " because if you do I shall say what a rotten father you've been. You're a fake,

that's what you are, a pure fake ! " And the curtain comes down. Shortly before this Sands had declared that he was prepared to come up for judgment when called upon in this world or the next. As if anybody would ever ask Mr. Tearle to explain or justify anything !

This piece is what is popularly termed a " winner." Let me say at once that nobody could play Sands better than Mr. Tearle plays him. But, then, he ought to play him well ; he has not acted any other part for many, many months. I am getting a little tired of these *rôles* which playwrights invent for this actor, each one as like another as your ready-made tailor's " 1,000 *distinctive* suits." Do not playwrights, backers, and advisers know that Mr. Tearle is no mere mannequin, showing off crumpled suits whilst the rest of the cast is ironed and creased out of existence ? Does not the public realise that Mr. Tearle is one of our greatest actors when he is given the chance ? Does not Mr. Tearle remember his own Othello ? And will he not keep his soul alive at matinées with something in which he is called upon to act ? The handing out of Mr. Lonsdale's platitudes calls for no more creative impulse on the part of the actor than waiting at a banquet demands artistic creation in the waiter. One would not have been surprised if at the end of the show Mr. Tearle had murmured " I'm leaving now, sir. I hope everything has been very satisfactory." Everything had been superlative, but the great artist in Mr. Tearle had found little to do.

There was one really fine piece of imaginative acting, and that was the dipsomaniac of Mr. Franklyn Bellamy. There is nothing easier to do on the stage than your pathological specimen, and that is why the bad actor always overdoes it. Mr. Bellamy's superficial tricks and contortions were just sufficient to suggest the rotting mind and decaying conscience. Some little time ago I saw this actor in a piece in which he had to play a bogus parson. To the outward eye the man was sound, to the inward eye he was the very genius of humbug. Mr. Bellamy has given other hints of being a very good actor; he completely overshadows everybody else in the present play.

But all the players mentioned by name were good. Miss Una O'Connor contributed a clever little sketch, and I do not imagine that Garrick got more out of Abel Drugger than Mr. Rothbury Evans sought to extract from the tiniest of parts.

March 16.

"London Life"

A Play by ARNOLD BENNETT and EDWARD KNOBLOCK

Theatre Royal, Drury Lane

YEARS ago a youthful critic, rashly daring, advised young Mr. Pinero to try his hand at a novel. I have often wondered whether it was the same mischievous fellow who called Mr. Bennett's attention to the stage. Yet that this great novelist needed any considerable amount of prodding is open to doubt. I am persuaded that Mr. Bennett regards *The Old Wives' Tale*, *Clayhanger* and *Riceyman Steps* as mere trivia, and would desire posterity to judge him by his plays. It was ever so. A Gladstone will pride himself upon his concoction of humorous verse, a Lauder upon his power to regenerate the world.

London Life would have made a capital novel. The management at Drury Lane very thoughtfully provided the critics with first aid in the form of an elaborate synopsis of the plot. Reading this one realises that the play is the skeleton of a work of prose fiction in the master's best manner. It divides the characters into three groups. The first consists of a pushful solicitor,

who has swallowed the Five Towns whole and could have made a meal of fifty more, his plain little wife and their clever daughter. The second group is made up of a Jewish " card," in business at Ipswich as a money-lender, and " Georgie " Dream, a farthing dip of the provincial music hall stage, potentially a London star. (How clever of Mr. Bennett to know that these little ladies like to give themselves a boy's name !) The third group contains a country squire and his ambitious spouse. " With " them a nobleman, who is a budding politician. The pushful solicitor (group 1) rescues the country squire (group 3) from the clutches of the moneylender (group 2), and the whole of this provincial crowd, being thus knit together, sets towards London, shaking its fist at that city, and crying, after the manner of Rastignac : " Maintenant, à nous deux, trois, quatre "—or whatever the number may be.

In a note on the programme Mr. Bennett confides to us that the play was written in a small cabin on a small yacht in violent weather. In these circumstances it no doubt seemed to him extremely good. Reading the synopsis in a room of ordinary size and in the wintry weather normal to the time of year, I can see in it an excellent outline for a play of domestic interest in a small theatre. Even at Drury Lane the first act is admirable. Nobody understands your provincial better than Mr. Bennett. It were pedantic to object that young Staffordshire solicitors, however pushful, are as little likely to attempt to best a moneylender at the cost of professional misconduct as they are to

possess Mr. Ainley's romantic cast of feature and leonine mane. I submit that no solicitor who has just won a case bringing his client £600,000 is entitled to tell that client's creditor that if he pushes a perfectly legal claim for £1,400 he will be compelled to advise the client to file his petition. A play, however, must be got going somehow, and the point can be waived. What is important is that throughout the first act the characters are well observed, the dialogue is natural and amusing, and generally entertainment is in the air.

To everybody's disappointment the rest of the play was just dull. There was a scene on the Terrace of the House of Commons in which nothing happened, except that the solicitor, grown to a Political Force, tenderly pressed the hand of the country squire's wife, now a Political Hostess, thus giving her husband, according to the synopsis, "insufficient cause" for jealousy. But in the process of becoming a Political Force the solicitor appeared to have lost all wit and gumption, together with all trace of his Staffordshire accent. It was his motion which indirectly brought about the fall of the Government, yet he wriggled into the new Cabinet with the utmost difficulty, and then only through the Hostess's influence. He fell an easy victim to a trap laid for him by the little Jew, and consented to be hounded out of public life because he had made £60,000 out of a perfectly innocent deal in coal shares. He didn't know the Prime Minister intended to introduce a Bill which would raise the price of coal, and at the first suggestion of peccancy

caved in. Are we to take it that it is the righteous who flee when no man pursueth, and the wicked who are bold as a lion ?

In the meantime our statesman had been " carrying on " with the hostess, choosing for his declaration three o'clock in the morning and the top of the stairs at the House in Carlton Gardens. He was going to run away with the lady (see *The New Machiavelli*), when news was brought, during a fête given by the moneylender, that her husband had drowned himself in a fit of pique. " Can we love with the dead man lying between us ?' she asked (see one of Mr. Monkhouse's early plays). The answer, in this case, was yes. These two people are capable of anything, and in good North-country English, one would not put an immediate elopement " past " them. But the solicitor decided to go back to the little woman whom he and Mr. Bennett had entirely forgotten.

In his programme note Mr. Bennett tells us that a big theatre compels the dramatist to strip away inessentials and reduce his stuff to the bedrock of primary emotions. In other words, if you want to splash at a ten-league canvas you must use brushes of comets' hair. Why, then, didn't he ? If the solicitor had seized the hostess by the scruff of the neck and rushed her off to a honeymoon on Popocatepetl, if he had shot the moneylending fox, strangled the blackmailing peer who demanded his daughter as the price of silence, and tipped the insulting Prime Minister into the ornamental water—if Mr. Bennett had made

his hero go in for any or all of these things, why then he would have been, as they say, "talking." But the genteel note of drawing-room melodrama does not take on primal emotion by being uttered through a megaphone, nor do the passions become elemental because they are bandied about in sixty-foot rooms. *London Life* is the old St. James's Theatre type of drama with a loud speaker attached. As for the spectacle—well, it was nothing tremendous. The cinema has changed our views as to the spectacular. The Terrace, the Head of the Staircase, the Garden Fête—they were all very pretty and proper and nice, but one wasn't enormously thrilled.

I couldn't help wondering what class of person is going to like this play. Certainly not the people who know what the insides of houses in Carlton Gardens are really like, and equally not those who, expecting to find them hot-houses of iniquity, are met by the cold blast of utmost decorum. "Can we love . . . ? etc., etc." I seem to remember a play at this house in which three ex-soldiers were nearly drowned in a coal mine, and one of them became a member of Parliament, and made a speech in Westminster Abbey to the throb of a hushed organ. The highbrows may have deemed *Old Bill, M.P.* to be a foolish play; to me it seemed the perfect expression of this difficult medium. If it was silly, at least its silliness was on the grand scale. *London Life* is silly on a small scale, which is making the worst of both worlds. If your play which is to be the "bed-rock of primary emotions"

must concern itself with coal and politics, let it show us the coal miners and the politicians running real risks and taking death-or-glory chances. Niceties of conduct in the Stock Exchange and the Divorce Court are useless matter for Drury Lane.

Messrs. Frank Cochrane and Henry Vibart were the best among the men. Miss Olive Sloane "got over"—she always does—and Miss Lilian Braithwaite gave the same performance which has come triumphantly through so many plays.

June 8.

"The Rat"

A Play by DAVID LESTRANGE

Prince of Wales Theatre

THIS is a good melodrama, written in red ink and served piping hot—a trifling foolish mixed metaphor, perhaps, but no matter. It were a foolish thing to despise the medium of which this is an excellent specimen. That melodramatic person, Wainewright the poisoner, laid it down that every work of art must be judged by laws deducible from itself. An elegy must submit to elegiac rule, and a conjurer content himself with a verdict in terms of rabbits and top hats. Judged by its own standard, *The Rat* is an excellent entertainment. It contains nothing for the simplest-minded to shy at.

The play opens in a den of the Paris underworld—the "White Coffin." Among the absinthe bottles are disposed the ladies of the establishment, frail fair, whose robes, to quote a famous playwright, are a little dusty at the hem. We dimly guess their wearers' quality, though we pierce to it through veils of generosity. "Sale type!" one of these young women will cry, to be surprised next moment in some prodigy

of self-sacrifice on behalf of the " type." One of them is Mr. Kipling's *Red-haired Girl* all over again. Most self-sacrificing of all is Odile, an innocent as much out of place here as a daisy in a forcing-house. We know Odile to be an innocent because she has the wide-eyed stare of Greuze and a nose which, with some pressing, we might call snub. Or shall we say that it is scenting Heaven ?

Chancing to find herself alone at midnight in this more than doubtful resort, Odile abates no jot of her composure, but falls to her knitting and meditates upon her hopeless passion for " The Rat." Communing thus, a maid whom in this den there are none to praise and very few to love, one who sends the spectator harking for parallels to Wordsworth's Lucy, Puvis de Chavannes' girlish and saintly Geneviève, or anybody's Joan save Mr. Shaw's—Odile being thus rapt, a well-dressed scoundrel entered and forced what Sir Arthur Pinero would call his unwelcome attentions upon her. Whether innocence would have been its own sufficient cloak we shall never know, for " The Rat," who happened to have been sitting concealed under the table for the previous twenty minutes, intervened and bit the fellow in the neck. Why Pierre, to give him his proper name, should have been thus ensconced is not made clear. Perhaps he had a premonition, or again he may have been an eccentric. Your " type " is often out of the ordinary ; that is why he is so miscalled. Later on we are to see Pierre kill the scoundrel and Odile take the blame upon herself.

For artless is as artless does, and Odile was not such a fool as not to know that, with a jury, it was reasonable odds on her acquittal and any odds against Pierre.

But before we get to this a great deal of the Seine is to flow under the Pont Alexandre. We are to see Pierre enamoured of Zélie de Chaumet, who is a re-creation of the *grande amoureuse* of Dumas *fils*, even of the courtesan of Balzac. Was it Jenny Cadine who, when her rival at the party cast a jealous eye upon her pearls, heaped them upon a plate and commanded the waiter to offer them to Madame? "Moi, j'en aurai toujours!" Zélie deals in similar grandiosities and sublimities, and "The Rat," to match her, rises to heights one had thought the gutter glimpsed not. Zélie will, for pure love, abandon Paris, her protector and her pearls, seeking only "la campagne et la pureté," by which she means Marseilles and monogamy. "J'en aurai pour deux!" she cried. She will have enough money for two. But the soul of the apache revolts. Knife a man for his wallet, yes. Accept money from a woman, no! And he rushes off to defend the honour of the lily in her garret and put his head in the guillotine.

But before Odile can extricate it, and, incidentally, her own, there is much ado. Zélie has to visit Pierre, raving on his mattress. Her ropes of pearls are more numerous than ever, which is very fit and proper, and justifies the child's wisdom. She tells the madman, inconsequently, that both of them have "learned through suffering." Oh these *clichés!* But Pierre does not recognise Zélie. Instead, a' babbles of wild

flowers. And when Odile returns, bedewed with the jury's tears, a' talks of ghosts and phantoms. Yes, it is decidedly great fun.

Mr. Ivor Novello plays " The Rat " very much in the tradition of Sir John Martin Harvey—that is to say, worthily and well. His cinema following—present, one gathered, in force—might have been excused for fearing lest the stage words of Mercury should prove harsh after the screen poems of Apollo: But they trembled needlessly. Miss Dorothy Batley, a newcomer, played uninjured innocence very well indeed. A few more parts like Odile, and she can be trusted to hold her own in something that makes sense. Mr. Cronin Wilson's villain reminded one of what the French critic said of Beethoven's music to *Egmont*. " Hélas ! pourquoi y en a-t-il si peu ? " Why so little of this polished and agreeable scoundrel ?

But the best performance was that of Miss Isabel Jeans, who rode the wave of vapidity almost as triumphantly as Congreve's wit or Wycherley's hurly-burly. Miss Jeans ought to prove a wonderful recruiting officer for the Phœnix Society. One wonders whether the good folk who, on Monday night last, " fell " for this admirable actress, and bore away with them a ten minutes' recollection—one wonders whether they realise that four times a year they may be privileged, for a small subscription, to gather memories for a lifetime. Miss Jeans had few sentences which, pursued into the fastnesses of ultimate meaning, were not drivel ; yet she made them appear rational. Hear

her deliver such a banality as "You like my frock? I must tell my dressmaker." Note how, with the dying away of the voice on that last word of bathos, the spirit is launched on seas of uncharted indifference and luxury unpardonable. Those who have seen this actress in modern pieces only cannot guess how exquisite she can look in plays written before the shingling era. She will look exquisite again when the mode once more permits ladies to refrain from a cut of the hair long familiar to pugilists and other ungentle spirits.

This play should have a long run. It is a collector's piece, complete in every detail. No *cliché* in the way of phrase has been omitted, and no tag of sentiment neglected. "David Lestrange" may possess his soul in peace. The home fire will be kept burning throughout the remainder of the summer.

June 15.

"The Man in the Next Room"

A Play by ELIOT CRAWSHAY WILLIAMS

The Interlude Players

REALLY one cannot believe that the English theatre is as empty of good new plays as the programmes of some of our Sunday societies would have us suppose. If we are to consider it seriously, *The Man in the Next Room* is as silly a piece as ever ushered in the silly season. It is vapid and sensational, improbable, and withal dull—four good reasons why a manager with any respect for the drama should turn down a play.

But—and there is much virtue in but—it may be that Mr. Williams would not desire us to take his play seriously. He may very well have remarked that pieces devoid of artistic merit have, nevertheless, filled their theatres for hundreds of nights. He may have observed that in the foyer during the intervals the question is not the general "Does this play show a Theatre Advancing?" but a particular "Is this a winner?" What the box-office officials, "library"

representatives, advertisement managers, and the rest mean is simply, " Can we bank upon there being a sufficient number of silly people to like this silly play, and to go on liking it eight times a week for twelve months ? "

I am inclined to think that in this piece Mr. Williams made the mistake of not giving silliness his single and undivided attention, even of coquetting with its opposite ; whereas he should have known that the whole secret of the " winner " or best seller is singleness of purpose and " sincerity." A best seller is not the middling work of a good writer ; it is the best work of which your middling writer, striving with might and main, is capable. The tragedy of the dullard is that his maximum might and main get him nowhere. Garvice was just as " sincere " as Dickens, only he had no noticeable genius to be sincere with. Quite recently Mr. Walkley was telling us that the enormous success of the French playwright Scribe was due to his mediocrity of mind. But that mediocrity must not be suspect, and, indeed, must always be the real thing ; the public is infinitely shy of being written down to, and correspondingly acute in detecting that condescension. The good passages in Mr. Williams's play must make even the simplest wonder whether any man, who had not his tongue in his cheek, could put together such monstrous rubbish as, by contrast, they now perceive the rest to be. Take out the good passages, eliminate your specialised Sunday audience, and the piece is not more foolish than any other spectacular melodrama.

It occurs to me that this play might, with very little alteration, go well at Drury Lane. The first thing, of course, would be to bring to life the man in the next room, in the present version a non-existent abstraction of no interest. A politician who, from the straitened means indicated by the tenancy of Mrs. Street's bed-sitting-room, can rise in a year to a position of affluence enabling him to fling a thousand-pound cheque into the face of poor discarded Sally Street—there's your Drury Lane villain ready-made. And I think that possibly Sally's father should have "words" with the scoundrel, as well as with his daughter. I could not quite make out why the Streets retained their so objectionable lodger. They were all in work, and could doubtless have replaced him. Perhaps there was about old Street a hint of Halévy's Monsieur Cardinal, who, when the Marquis Cavalcanti made avowal both of his passion for Virginie Cardinal and his honourable intentions towards her parents, replied: "I do not understand. It is not proper that I should understand. Also, I have an appointment at four o'clock. Permit, however, that I bid M. le Marquis not good-bye, but au revoir!"

There was a brother of Sally's in this act, who, in an amended version, would do better as a humble lover. This small part was played with quite extraordinary tact and understanding by Mr. Roger Livesey, whom I take to be the son of a greatly talented artist far too seldom seen in London. In the second act Mr. Felix Aylmer would have to go or consent to play

second and confidential fiddle. The villain of a self-respecting melodrama must really face his own music instead of listening to it through the keyhole. Why should not Mr. Aylmer himself play the scoundrel? Why condemn this fine actor to perpetual corners in souls of stainless steel?

Up to this point the play had been quite good. The dialogue, in particular, reverberated with old echoes of the Lane. "Street's yer name, and the street's where yer'll go if yer cuts any capers. Understand?" the old man threatened. "Of course, I understand, father," replied Sally, with the beatific air of the young woman in that picture so greatly beloved of furnishers on the hire-system and called, if I remember aright, "The Soul's Awakening." "Hope yer not offended, my dear?" the old man went on. "Oh, no offence at all, father," replied Sally, something hoity-toity. And we feel that she was within an ace of saying "Granted!" Again the scene in which Sally leaned up against the door like *Love Locked Out*, or whatever that popular picture is called, was very good Lane indeed. Of course Sally refused the cheque, at first. "The price of a year of me, of my love and reputation!" (Only she used a rawer, cruder word.) But in the end she took the money. "It will be useful," she said with a sardonic little gurgle that boded no good to the villain.

The third act, in which a night club is raided, cries out for those multiple splendours which only Drury Lane can show. Sally has risen to those heights

indicated by her change of name from Sally Street to Sarah De La Rue. " Here comes Sarah," says one of the characters, and it is with something of a shock that one beholds Miss Isobel Elsom clad in a mantle of that misty grey which has other and unforgettable associations. Sally, it appears, has become something of a philosopher. " Life's a ladder that some never climb," etc., etc. She airs views which show that if her creator has not already studied Villiers de l'Isle Adam he would enjoy that cynic. A smart woman expresses her astonishment that " we Society people can mix with dancing instructors." But on the whole the picture of gay life is skimped. The scene demands the battalions rather than the single spies of vice. It wants bevies of houris and hordes of waiters, coveys of night-birds and cohorts of police. The rising politician, supping surreptitiously in a private room, should be taken between savoury and liqueur as Schéhérazade was taken. To jump out of window " off " is no exit for a self-respecting rogue.

It now appears that Sally, who could support a rival of her own class, would brook no wife. She could, through the chink of a door, save her bachelor-betrayer's reputation ; his married life she would not save. So when the man, now Foreign Minister, took to himself a wife, Sally went to the Foreign Office and " did him in." This, again, happened " off." How any melodramatist can have let slip so many opportunities " licks Pompey," as they say up in Lancashire. It might be possible to retain the amusing chatter of

the F.O. employees, or whatever their august appellation may be, but I doubt it. Murder does not consort with teacups. On the other hand, the "provincial gentleman" in the night club provided exactly the kind of comic relief Drury Lane demands. And I suggest that the first part of the play be condensed, and compensated by an acquittal of the heroine under the unwritten law. Sally's brother, who, I repeat, must be changed into her lover, could now pick up the pieces of her broken heart. They say criticism should be constructive. I have done the next best thing—I have reconstructed.

Mr. Livesey and Mr. Aylmer gave the best acting of the evening, and next to their performances I place the whimsicalities of Messrs. Clive Currie, Perceval Clark, and A. Harding Steerman. Miss Isobel Elsom's Sally finds me in a difficulty. In spite of manifold adroitnesses and multiple skill, I never believed in the character for a moment. But perhaps this was the author's fault.

July 20.

"Low Tide"

A Dramatic Incident by ERNEST GEORGE

Everyman Theatre

MR. ERNEST GEORGE has written a remarkable little play. *Low Tide* may not have much point, perhaps, but the author goes straight to such point as there is. The piece began at a quarter past eight, and was well over by ten o'clock. This in itself is a virtue, brevity being the soul of more things than wit. The playwright saw a little play to write, saw it and wrote it. And then stopped writing. The audience showed considerable enthusiasm, and at least one member of it would willingly have sat on and seen the piece again from beginning to end.

There is no law of the theatre which compels everything enacted therein to be a fully developed five-act tragedy, at the end of which we are to know everything about all the characters. Mr. George has carefully labelled his play "A Dramatic Incident in Three Acts"—"scenes" would have been better—and an incident it very nearly is. The middle act is pure phenomenon in the dictionary sense of a thing that appears or is perceived, unencumbered with

explanation. Played by itself, it would make a singularly perfect playlet, taut, spare, and self-sufficing. Let me describe it as nearly as I remember.

The scene is a wharf on the Thames, the hour midnight. The old watchman has trouble with his lamp. A knock at the door and the policeman on the beat pops in for a fag, a nip, and a quasi-amicable chat. He resumes his policing. The next visitor is an old hag, and one time flame of the watchman. She is drunk, but not, in her opinion, drunk enough. She will make a bargain—more drink against a warning. The negotiations are largely exhumatory, the past bringing up its dead in ghoulish gusto. An amusing—or, if you like, deplorable—light is thrown upon the relations between conjugal fidelity and preventive detention. The lady confesses that her surrender was dictated not by passion but by exigencies consequent upon her old man being "jugged." She was "hearts of oak," which is rhyming slang for "broke." And the watchman offered.

But even twenty-year-old recriminations must have an end, and at last we get to the warning. The watchman will be lucky if he is alive by midnight! At this point marauders are heard making thievish noises on the other side of the wall. The ancient couple fly—the hag taking to her broomstick, or whatever it is she came on, the wharf-keeper in pursuit of the friendly "rozzer," or policeman. The thieves are two, a bully of the approved waterside type and his accomplice, a cowering, timorous beastie obviously impressed for the job. After some altercation the

assistant hops it over the wall and is apparently shot dead. The policeman turns up again, vaguely attracted by the noise, and an excellent colloquy with the murderer ensues. The dialogue here is of an admirable suspense. The copper, we feel, is on the brink of eternity, receding therefrom inch by inch as the other, still fingering his revolver, realises that he has an unsuspecting fool to deal with, and inch by inch gains upon the door. At length the policeman turns his back, and the murderer escapes. A second later the mind of the policeman begins to work, and he raises the alarm. The whole of this act is first-rate, and complete without bother of causation or consequence.

The other two acts seek to explain what passions urge men who can behave themselves in war to misbehave themselves in peace, and women to split upon them. The bully believes honesty to be a policy payable only at death and in another world ; he has no use for it in this. The timid accomplice is his brother, who took advantage of the bully's absence at the front to marry his girl. The girl consented, because the young man lodged with her mother and the neighbours " talked." The hag split upon the bully because he called her " old and barmy." That is the first act. In the last the bully woos the girl by force, and is about to carry her off when a muscular priest arrives bearing the body, in which there is still a flicker of life. On his heels is a posse of police. There is no moral to this incident, except that people shouldn't do such things.

It may be said that Mr. George has not explored his low-life seams as curiously as Mr. Kipling explored them in *The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot* or Mr. Maugham in *Liza of Lambeth.* But though there may, even must, be more in his subject than Mr. George has given us, we realise that at least he has attempted no whitewashing and told no tarradiddles. The men come to life, without exception. There are still plenty of brutes like Pat Donovan, pure animals who glory in their animalism. If there had never been this sort Man would not have survived in his struggle with a brute creation totally unembarrassed by the finer instincts. Such men as Pat spend their lives halting between appetite and fear till they come to dangle at the halter's end. Frankly, I am exhilarated, on occasion, by a picture of rank, uncomplicated badness without squeamish, Freudian exculpations ; and this was one of the occasions. Pat Donovan, like Bill Sikes, was an honest blackguard, and though one might agree with eleven others upon the expediency of sending him to the gallows, one would hardly refuse to take his hand.

Mr. Claude Rains played the part with a virility and power which it did one good to see. The actor looked six inches taller than he really is, and was at times quite frightening. How is it that this fine player is not seen more often on the West End stage ? With the exception of *Robert E. Lee* and one or two appearances for the play-producing societies, including an excellent performance in Mr. Munro's *The Rumour*,

I do not remember Mr. Rains in anything since *Daniel.* In that piece of decadent nonsense he gave a fine study of unhealthy radiance and dazzling corruption. A critic wrote of this portrait that it had " the anger of thwarted rubies and the fatigue of ineffectual lilies." But perhaps the critic was feeling " ninety-ish." That Mr. Rains can convey the Beardsley mood and also portray the " rough " of our own day demonstrates that he is an actor of great accomplishment. There was not an inch of Mr. Rains that was not acting, from the muscles of his neck to the jut of his thigh. Messrs. Ivor Barnard, Gordon Harker, Aubrey Mather, and Granville Darling were all excellent.

The women's parts were probably more difficult, as the author has left them very sketchy. It is unfair to any actress to keep her in a paroxysm of terror and a flood of tears throughout a whole act, and this is what Miss Olive Sloane had to undertake. It was a change to see this clever actress attempt something different from the vulgar, good-hearted termagants and sirens in which of late she has been so successful. I do not think that the whirlpool and the maelstrom are Miss Sloane's line, but the experiment will do her good, and it was by no means unsuccessful. If I thought I should often see this actress in such deep distress I might suggest that rain and shine alternate too quickly in her countenance. You can't weep real tears one moment and forget all about them the next. But the part was immensely difficult. As the harridan Miss Ethel Coleridge won an easy and instantaneous success.

And so did the play. It is a good play which will, in my humble opinion, make a fortune for any West End manager with the courage of the East End. Only I should shorten it a little, so that it plays to an hour and a half, and give Miss Sloane an after-piece more suited to her sunny and original gifts. Since criticism is to be constructive, let me suggest Miss Hermione Baddeley for Mary Donovan. She could play the spitfire to her heart's content and would be more nearly a match for the power of Mr. Rains, who could not possibly be improved upon. His is a really magnificent performance.

August 17.

"The Claimant"

A Play by M. F. WATTS

Queen's Theatre

LET me confess that all the time when I should have been asking myself whether Roger Tunstall was or was not the rightful heir to the baronetcy, the question uppermost in my mind was: Where is Mr. Leon M. Lion? For Mr. Lion specialises in turning those inchoate bundles of mystification, which amateurs call a play, into something with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Mrs. Watts's play has an admirable beginning with a full stream of interest, a stragglesome, meandering middle, and an end like a sandy delta.

The first act introduces us to the Tunstall family, which, since it contains those two admirable artists, Miss Ada King and Mr. Bromley Davenport, promises to provide by itself sufficient entertainment for a whole evening. But these nice people do not survive the first act. Londoners do not know the full genius of Miss King—poor, benighted dears, how should they? But Mr. Basil Dean knows. He knows, through his training with Miss Horniman's company, what a

superb artist she is, and that her Mrs. Jones in *The Silver Box* was, and is, unrivalled. Her part in this play is tiny, but see what she makes of it ! A toss of the bonnet, the stare of an infuriated mouse, indignation helpless as the gasp of a dying fish—the character stands before you with the significance of a drawing by Belcher. And I had nearly written Rembrandt. Mr. Bromley Davenport, too, has the power of suggesting more in three minutes than most actors can convey in three hours. But I must not dally with these charming folk, likeable beneath their eccentricity.

These elder members of the family are only mad north-north-west : they know a hawk from a handsaw. They also know a Tunstall from a Lolita. Now Lolita was a Spanish dancer who, very imprudently from the family's point of view, had married the last baronet. Her son had decamped abroad, for reasons unstated, twenty-five years before the play began, and had long been presumed lost in the South African War. So the estate and the millions were to devolve upon Diana Tunstall, a cousin, as soon as she should come of age.

At this point there was a general leavetaking of sense and rationality. Lolita, who for twenty-five years had acquiesced in her son's death, now began to advertise for him in all the papers of the world, including, one supposes, the *Umbopa Times* and the *Nyanza Gazette* (Albert and Victoria). There was a certain method in Lolita's madness, since the advent of any capable pretender would at least give her the dower-

house and a finger in the millions ; and, anyhow, Miss Gilda Varesi's gusto swallowed up all question of improbability. But Diana's lunacy was incomprehensible. She simply didn't want the Tunstall fortune, and was prepared to hand it over to just anybody, in return, one presumed, for a "place" as a nursery governess.

This ninny of the fragile intellect was entrusted to Miss Fay Compton, who seems to me to be playing all those parts which she shouldn't and none of those which she should. There is, I suppose, nobody on the English stage possessed of a greater power of suggesting purity and innocence : Miss Compton throws this away and dabbles in black-eyed jades like Yasmin. No actress that I know can so mingle dewy pathos and the salt of sanity : yet she must forego these in favour of gumptionless Dianas. And now it appears that Roger, who is played by Mr. Leon Quartermaine, also has no particular feeling for the Tunstall fortune ; all that attracted him was the portrait of Diana which appeared in the same issue of the paper as the advertisement. Now, since it is obvious from the beginning that Roger and Diana are in the position of Shelley's waves, whose whole business in life was to clasp one another—since our lovers must come together at the end, they would, one thinks, being sane, normal beings, leave the plaguey business of the succession and go fifty-fifty in the common spoil. But this does not occur to Roger, who, being a man, is excusably romantic. What is unbelievable is that it should not

occur to Diana, who, being a woman, must have the keener business instinct. I have already implied that Miss Fay Compton cannot play a fool. Her Diana is merely incredible. She is also charming, but that's the actress's affair, not the play's.

A romantic piece has got to be eked out somehow, and therefore we have further complications in the way of a blackmailing gentleman who discovers that Roger has a wife. "Admitted," says Roger, "but she's only a naughty blackamoor, and I can divorce her any old time." But to Diana a blackamoor is a black amour indeed! Besides, Diana is a Roman Catholic, and therefore cannot marry Roger even if he gets his divorce. So our hero has to decide whether he will be Roger with a wife, or not-Roger with no wife. And while he is deciding we have a fancy dress ball, and an irrelevant interlude in which Miss Lottie Venne dresses up as Britannia and wrestles with some not very funny lines. Then Roger closes the blackmailer's mouth by shooting him in the foot, and at long last owns up to being an impostor and the illegitimate son of one of the deceased baronet's brothers, who had contracted a bogus marriage, also with a Spanish dancer. Gay dogs, the Tunstalls! A little later yet and the family lawyer holds out the hope that this pretended marriage may have been a genuine affair after all. And so, perhaps, Roger has "all along" pretended more honourably than he knew. However, it is too late to go into that. The hour is past eleven, the audience is yawning for home. So she loves him,

and he loves her, as Miss Nora Bayes has it, and the wall of the Tunstall estate no longer stands between.

There are some good points about the play—its first act, for example, and all Lolita's part, which is admirably laid out and contains many witty lines. (Miss Varesi did immensely with it, by the way, and swept everybody else except Miss King off the stage. Anybody who wants to know what temperament can do for a player should go and look at Miss Varesi, whose performance will also tell the curious something about foreign acting. Why an artist, whose outstanding success was recognised by the whole house, should not have been given a " curtain " I do not profess to understand.) But the rest of the piece badly needed adapting for the stage. The cast also contained such excellent players as Messrs. Clifford Mollison, Edmond Breon, Fewlass Llewellyn, and George Elton, and was probably the strongest seen in a West End theatre for several seasons. To have a fine theatre and an unparalleled cast and to waste both upon a silly play is, I venture to think, unworthy of Mr. Dean's reputation. Why does he not revive *The Silver Box* and give London Miss King ?

September 14.

"The Blue Peter"

A Play by E. TEMPLE THURSTON

Princes Theatre

THE management of the Princes Theatre having sent me, with great courtesy and consideration, a copy of Mr. E. Temple Thurston's *The Blue Peter*, I am able to offer my readers a few observations resulting from a study, not of the acted play, but of the written text. Those whose business it is to judge of plays from type-script, *i.e.*, theatrical managers, always complain of the impossibility of their task. Surely they would lighten it if they would but remember that rubbish is rubbish on the stage as well as off. No amount of acting can turn nonsense into sense.

Probably the difficulty is to determine whether a piece which is neither rubbish nor yet any great intellectual shakes possesses those qualities which make it what the average playgoer calls a "good play." Is its subject interesting? Is the setting "intriguing"? Does it raise and satisfy small anxieties and suspenses in the way of action and dialogue? Does it superficially startle and shock? Are its flowers of speech gaudy, and is the sentiment firmly rooted in those

conventions which have made Britain what, alas! she is? These are ticklish, though not unanswerable, questions.

Now I predict, with confidence, success for *The Blue Peter*. The subject, which is the conflict between a man's work and what it is the fashion of our strong playwrights to call "his woman," is always interesting. (Do American films ever treat of anything else?) In the mind's eye, I can see the audience neatly divided into two camps warming themselves at the common fires of sex-antagonism. The setting—a bungalow in Nigeria, the domestic hearth of the little home in Liverpool, the bar parlour down by the docks—is varied and amusing. The action is exceedingly deft and exciting, and the talk has the veneer of the pseudo-philosophical. It is conceivable that the problem gave Mr. Thurston a qualm or two; it didn't, you see, admit of any really palatable solution. Fortunately, there was a perfectly glorious red herring close at hand, in the aureate glow whereof the audience could be sent home contented. And once home it doesn't very much matter that we should begin to think. A "good play" is one which prevents an audience from thinking till it gets home.

And now for a few facts. David Hunter is a mining engineer in Central Africa. We learn at once that he is down with fever, that his boat sails in four days for England, Home and Marriage, and that he is a heroic fellow who has saved the life of a native chief's son at the risk of his own. His companion is one Formby,

a hard-bitten cad of sorts. To them enters Plevin, a "rotter" who has left the only remaining white man in the settlement to be cut up by hostile natives. These now attack the bungalow. Enter Walmsley, the bush policeman, with a touch of what the author calls the "Oxford swagger" still sticking to him. "These beggars must be punished," he says in effect. "Rather!" replies Hunter. And he cables home, putting off his marriage, confident that the little woman will understand.

In the second act we find Hunter a six-years married man. It is Christmas Eve, which is perhaps an excuse for Emma and her mother-in-law to indulge in generalities about Life with a capital L. Here is some of the conversation :

> Mrs. H. : Anyone can find David who wants him badly enough.
>
> Emma : I want him.
>
> Mrs. H. : Yes—my dear—but I'm not sure, do you need him ?
>
> Emma : What d'you mean ?
>
> Mrs. H. : You've got your babies. Haven't you given your life up to them ?
>
> Emma : Selfishly ?
>
> Mrs. H. : No ; inevitably.
>
> Emma : D'you mean I've taken myself away from him ?
>
> Mrs. H. : No—life takes you. Life goes on. We all go with it.
>
> Emma : You think it'll take him away from me ?
>
> Mrs. H. : No—I don't think it will—

because it needs him here. He doesn't know that yet.

I submit that people in Liverpool villas don't talk like that. Mr. Thurston, of course, was in a difficulty. If he showed us a querulous spouse, justly annoyed because her husband chose to dawdle in town on Christmas Eve instead of coming home to her and the kiddies, how was he to adumbrate the heroine of his stage directions? Emma is " attractive, but not alluring, the mother type . . . who subconsciously knows she is one of the essential cogs in the wheel of hidden purpose, and, while tender and gentle, lends herself inexorably to the highest demands of life." An Ibsen would have postulated a dowdy woman, unshingled and unbobbed, and trusted to luck and our perceptions. But Mr. Thurston also wanted to depict in David's mother an old lady who knows that the past is " but a wheel meshed in the cogs of the future, and that the great purpose is hidden from all of us." It is possible that we should not have detected these sublimities if the two women had been shown doing what they would naturally have done in the circumstances, *i.e.*, becoming fretful with each other and united in abusing the absent David. So we will pass that little matter of the dialogue.

With David's entry the dramatic cat is out of the bag. David has got the nostalgia of the Nigerian bush, and got it pretty badly. He is sick of a roof and four walls, and wants " the days under the sun and the nights under the stars." One wonders whether Mr.

Thurston has (a) been to Nigeria or (b) seen *White Cargo*. Also Formby has come back bearing a nugget of gold and mining concessions from the chief whose son's life David saved. Emma urges malaria, poisoned arrows, herself and bairns. But David is fed up with "the true pathos and sublime" of fireside life. The battle is ding-dong. However, he promises Emma not to go. He will just see Formby down to the docks. Now, will he go, or won't he? The interval is passed in suspense.

In the bar parlour David "goes through hell." This scene is a long elaboration of Mr. Masefield's wandering tinkers, reluctant before the gates of the perfect city, who

> . . . see the golden town and choose,
> And think the wild too good to lose,
> And camp outside, as these camped then
> With wonder at the entering men.

In the end David will camp outside; that is, he will sail that night for Nigeria. In the bar he meets Plevin, who had abandoned his white colleague and would now desert his job. (The play is exceedingly well constructed.) The landlord's daughter Rose is Plevin's mistress. She falls in love with David and procures for him Plevin's ticket, which is her only possibility of ingratiation. David, overjoyed, sends a letter of good-bye—or possibly au revoir—to his wife.

This is the unpalatable solution, and it is in Rose that we find our red herring. For she claims her reward from David, which is that he shall become her lover

now, and promise to love her on his return. Emma, she hints, need never know. This so shocks David, and every one, doubtless, of Mr. Thurston's admirers in the audience, that he runs straight away home, reclaims his letter, and promises nevermore to think of that naughty, nasty Nigeria.

The weakness of this must surely be obvious the moment we leave the theatre. The problem of Nigeria *versus* the Liverpool villa, which was stated with enormous circumstance in the second act, has not been solved at all. Rose, blooming behind her bar, has nothing to do with the case, and Mr. Thurston has wilfully enwrapped us in clouds of moral fervour to prevent us from seeing that he has not ended his play at all. Surely a moment's reflection should persuade even the sentimental that David's nostalgia will some time or other return more strongly than ever, that as soon as the children's school bills begin to come in he will think bitterly of that wasted gold-mine, and that when this happens those two cogs in the wheel of the future, Emma and his mother, are in for a pretty thin time. Is it cynical to suggest that, ultimately, David will be found sneaking down to that bar parlour by the docks ?

However, I have no doubt that in the theatre the play will act well and be a great success. Essentially it is silly, but essentials are things that can be safely left till we get home.

October 12.

"The Hour and the Man"

A Drama by FRANK STAYTON

New Theatre

THE attraction of good actors to bad plays is one of the commonplaces of criticism. Sarah's "Sardoodledum," Irving's Robespierre and Dante—these are old stories. This blight upon a great profession probably did not begin with Colley Cibber, and will certainly not end with the player of to-day. In moments of expansion your great actor will tell you that he does not really take to the lowest when he sees it, but merely puts it on. Then follows something about "My public . . ." Sarah's public was supposed to jib at her Phèdre, wherefore she took up with Fédora's numerous family. Irving's public was billed to shun his Iago as it would the devil, yet to fall on the neck of his Mephistopheles. I have no doubt that Mr. Lang is yearning to play Eugene O'Neill's *Hairy Ape*, a great play almost miraculously suited to the political hour and the actor, but that he fears to present it to empty benches.

Such fears are groundless. Your first-class artist is happy in the possession of a large and devoted following,

which will stand from him any good work *in reason.* That is to say, that it must just not be pure caviare. Now, Mr. Matheson Lang is one of the very best actors on the English stage. He has looks, figure, voice, perfect technical equipment, and immense power. His quantum of admirers is one which even the late Lewis Waller would have deemed adequate. Here, then, is an actor who could venture upon any masterpiece in reason. Why, one asks sadly, must he choose a piece which has no kind of connection with reason, or even rationality ? After the first scene, in which Mr. Lang impersonates a piece of war wreckage with quite extraordinary skill, the principal actor is not called upon to act. He is simply to sign letters, draw on motoring gloves, make perfunctory love, and utter the terse, quasi-humorous remarks of your monosyllabic strong man. If there is an excuse for a poor play it is that it offers a part for a great actor to tear a cat in. Sardou's puppets destroyed whole tribes of *felidæ ;* Mr. Stayton's protagonist does not even shoo poor puss out of the room.

In the first act, Julian Wear, an ex-lieut.-colonel, now " down and out," breaks into the midnight follies of a Gloucestershire country house, which include jazz dancing by a dowager duchess. He eats chicken sandwiches out of the hand of the Hon. Muriel Fortescue, and next morning, rested and breakfasted, again takes that hand and vows to its owner to " make good." Indeed, he holds that treasure so long that one thinks of that other Julian who, in the garden

with Madame de Rênal, "pensa qu'il était de son devoir d'obtenir que l'on ne retirât pas cette main quand il la touchait." We gather that it is "up to" Julian's lieut.-colonelcy to retain Muriel's hand. But from Mr. Stayton's world to that of Stendhal is perhaps too far a cry.

The second act shows how much better than good Julian has made. He is now Labour's appointed head, and has engineered a general strike of unprecedented magnitude. He is to make a speech at Bristol at 7 a.m. to-morrow morning, a speech which will bring down the Government. But Delilah, in the person of the Hon. Muriel, is at hand to overthrow this anarchic Samson. Muriel is uncompromisingly "county." "The ordered spaciousness of our life here is very dear to me," she cries, and to avoid cheapening it she will stick at nothing. Julian is her "dear enemy." (Echo of the circulating library !) First she would have him held up. But Julian spurns his assailant as he would an importunate 'bus conductor who should demand a fare twice.

Now Muriel, having wired the aristocrats to lay supper for two, put back the clock two hours, and go trustfully to bed, inveigles Julian to her home. After supper, moonlight and "musique de Massenet," as the French wit has it. "The world," declares Muriel, "is empty" ; and we know that the good folk upstairs are sound asleep. So Julian passes the night in Muriel's arms, having sworn her to call him at six (by the retarded clock) in time for that mass meeting at seven.

But Muriel had reckoned without the sun, which woke Julian betimes. (Why did not Delilah take a leaf out of Joshua's book ?) Muriel had jiggered up the car, but there was a motor-bike opportunely lying around. . . .

One felt a little curious as to what the patricians would say to Muriel in the morning. Would her starchy father, vaguely remembering his Macaulay, take his soiled dove to his arms ? Would he, saying " Well done, little girlie ; but there's no way out except this ! " choose a suitable weapon from the breakfast table and play the stern Roman ? (He had several times pulled Muriel's ear and called her Charlotte Corday.) Alas ! our curiosity is not satisfied. Instead, we wait upon Julian as Prime Minister, who, with a majority of five hundred, has in less than six months done away with trade competition and foreign intrigue abroad and unemployment at home. He has a way with him, too, has Julian. If one of his old " Red " colleagues shows himself to be irreconcilable, he makes him a Cabinet Minister. " You lack business experience," he says to one Dowse, " and therefore I offer you the Presidency of the Board of Trade ! " And if Dowse had not accepted, Julian would have had him shanghai'd by the " Knights of St. George," an Order of Black Shirts of which our hero-democrat is the head. And the play ends with the patricians embracing Julian, while Muriel gives for life that hand which tendered the chicken sandwiches.

The reception of this piece of pure silliness was

"mixed," and but for a desire to pay tribute to Mr. Lang's personal charm it would, I believe, have been unmixed. Of the leading performers I have already spoken. Of the others, Mr. A. S. Homewood, as Dowse, was excellent; Mr. C. M. Lowne gave forth monstrous stupidities with the air of a man of breeding; and Mr. Rothbury Evans cleverly suggested a nobleman of the old order. Miss Norah Robinson did well as a typist; Miss Jessie Winter failed to make any single word or act of Muriel's even remotely credible, but then I do not suppose anybody else could have done better. And I return to my beginning. Why does Mr. Lang choose such a piece? We, his admiring public, acclaim Mr. Lang whatever he does. But a play which recognised the claims of reason—a masterpiece even—would not have put so great a strain upon our loyalty.

November 2.

Entertainments

"Our Nell"

A Musical Play by LOUIS N. PARKER and REGINALD ARKELL. Music by H. FRASER-SIMSON and IVOR NOVELLO. Lyrics by HARRY GRAHAM

Gaiety Theatre

SURELY Miss José Collins must long for the spice of an occasional failure. These Gaiety Theatre historians repeat one another's plays with a persistence in triumph which, to an artist, must verge upon the cloying. It was obvious, at the finish of the proceedings, that the management had envisaged the possibility of success. The play was over, there had been innumerable calls, and at length Miss Collins, banked with flowers, was prevailed upon to speak. Her heart, she declared, was too full for words, but she could still sing. And the band, *à l'improviste*, struck up one of the tags of the opera, and a chorus was repeated, which was all very nice and adroit.

Just before this Mr. Robert Evett had called our attention to the fact that the production was all British. This, surely, was a work of supererogation. Wembley, when it opens, cannot breathe so much of the spirit

of the race as does *Our Nell.* The thing is as English as the Sunday joint, and as filling as it is expected. But has not Mr. Harry Tate a catch-word : " One way it is and the other it isn't " ? Looking from another angle, to acclaim the piece as British is an unflattering comment upon British art and British artists. It contains but one line of wit, and that line is applicable only to a bygone day. " We are not unmindful," says Charles, " that a king is the father of his people." " Of many of them, sire," says Rochester. I congratulate Mr. Parker or Mr. Arkell—they alone can know which.

But there both wit and humour began and ended. There was a scene in which Mr. Walter Passmore was put in the stocks and Mr. Miles Malleson was immured in the pillory, which reached the very nadir of depression. It seemed as if it would never end, and when at last it was over I felt as if it had begun in good King Charles's day and had been going on ever since. Poor Mr. Parker or poor Mr. Arkell ! How many pensive vigils must one or both have kept, writing this weary and supposed popular stuff, " sleepless themselves," as the poet observed, " to give their readers sleep ! " It was obvious that something was being prepared behind. That something was, in effect, the most monstrously garish " set " that the paint brush of man has ever perpetrated. It seared the eyeballs, and for a while I literally could only bear to look at the stage for a second or so at a time, and thus gradually grow to a state of insensibility.

As with some of the setting, so with most of the

costumes. It may be that Mr. Lovat Fraser and Mr. Nigel Playfair have spoiled our taste. But take the gowns worn by Nell. They were—I speak under correction—of no discernible period, and just about as unbeautiful as the mind of Hanover Square, 1924, could devise. A fortune had doubtless been spent upon them, but not a groat's worth of taste. Still, georgette in the dressmaker's mind covers a multitude of indiscretions.

The music had all the charm of the expected, but I do not think that even the most perfervid Britisher would peg out a claim for musical supremacy on the strength of this score. There is a patriotic song, which will doubtless capture the barrel organs. But I submit that our dead heroes who " sleep in their glory " should not be hiked out of their graves to provide a finale for a musical comedy.

The truth of the matter, as everybody knows, is that there is no kind of artistic sincerity or purpose behind these tedious exhibitions, which are designed purely as a setting for the art of Miss José Collins. There is no essential difference between this play about our Nell and that other about somebody else's Catherine, and not much of superficial unlikeness. Nell, Catherine, Anne Boleyn, Marie Antoinette, Florence Nightingale, Grace Darling—you could stretch the line out to the crack of doom—all are sisters under the skin and personality of this justly popular artist. And it is from this point of view that the play should be judged. *Our Nell*, then, is, on this interpretation, a good play and a success. It is a good

play because it enables Miss Collins to simulate the hoyden of the romping manners and the good, sound, throbbing heart ; because it enables her to sing a love ditty over the heads of a parcel of ragamuffins on the stage to her ecstatic worshippers in the gallery ; because, at the end of the second act, the plot sends her to the floor to take the full emotional count ; because it allows her to come up smiling for the third and last round, and get home on Charles with a sentimental right and left ; because it calls for those sweeping curtsies and declarations of being " vastly obleeged " alternating with such modernities as " You're a liar ! " Because, finally, it allows this artist to do what she has always done in exactly the same way.

Miss Collins has an enormous and fascinated following. Her broad, generous comedy is in the tradition of Mrs. Jordan, though her capable charm is individual, and not inherited. And she has occasional moments of sincerity bordering upon tears which are quite admirable. Mr. Michaelis's voice seemed to me a little tired. Mr. Arthur Wontner was the Charles, but his part was a shocking one. It should be an act of *lèse majesté* to represent our historic figures as noodles. Mr. Reginald Bach, as an old soldier who appears for five minutes only, smashed the whole play to smithereens by incautiously introducing some real acting. Mr. Miles Malleson recalled past glories. It is, I respectfully submit, a mistake to introduce real actors into musical comedy. It induces a kind of melancholy.

April 20.

The Empire

TWO rabid theologians could not agree as to whether one of their friends who had changed his religion had been converted or perverted. So they compromised upon the indeterminate " verted," without any prefix. I will simply say, then, that the Empire has verted to the music-hall show pure and unadulterated. Whether this is a declension from musical plays or a promotion from " the pictures " is a matter of taste. Personally, I welcome it, whatever it is.

I have not, since the war, seen any musical play which has not bored me beyond the limits of the endurable. (No. I did not see *Lilac Time*.) Let the curtain rise on anything which has been concocted by a dozen of those derivative and imitative gentlemen responsible for words and music, additional " numbers " and " lyrics "—let it go up on one of these hashes and I know what life is like behind the bars at Regent's Park. Quite sincerely, I do not believe that there is as much talent in any six musical plays taken together as you shall find in a single bill during any week at the Coliseum, Alhambra, Victoria Palace, or Holborn Empire. A successful music-hall artist must, to be successful, have considerable talent—at least, I only

know two "stars" who are completely and utterly devoid of that commodity. They say that you cannot prove a negative. That is nonsense. In the matter of non-existent talent the average musical-comedy actress proves it up to the hilt. If the Empire succeeds it will be due to the presence of brains upon its boards.

Only the management will have to realise that one swallow does not make a summer, equally that one good artist does not make a programme. The first half of the bill at the Empire was frankly rather thin, and the huge audience which had assembled to do honour to the reversion was not, I gathered, altogether satisfied. The Foster-Why Operatic Quartette unloaded upon us some stale Verdi and that abomination of Thomas concerning Titania, also two dreadful sentimentalities entitled *The Rose in the Garden* and *Darling, Good-night.* Then a Mr. Ben Ali Haggin gave us a living picture, *The Triumph of Venus*, which was all cry and no wool—certainly very little that had been made into garments. But for that extremely good and amusing juggler, Gaston Palmer, the first half would have been as dry as Mr. Ben Ali Haggin's home desert.

Everything comes to him who knows how to wait, including Miss Nora Bayes. To judge from this artist's reception you might have thought that she was Judic, Nellie Farren, Yvette Guilbert, and Marie Lloyd all rolled into one. She is not, but is possessed of a very genuine and undeniably individual talent. To begin with, Miss Bayes sang a song about returning

to London, which was the purest—pass me the word—drivel.

> I've been counting the days
> *Annoyed with delays !*

Surely not even our operatic translators can do worse ? And again :

> Tears in my eyes
> Breaking many home-ties.

But had not the paragraphists been busy telling us that what the artist had broken, by arrangement, were expensive home contracts ? Even genius should stick to the same tale. Yet this nonsense, droned to the most dismal of tunes, was delivered in a geranium-coloured mantle and a pose neither of which a Sargent would have scorned to paint.

An admirable song followed, in which, by the simple conduct of a fan,

> Every way the wind blows
> This sweetie goes

was made to conjure up all the airs of heaven. For a while each song, and each line of each song, seemed like a new conquest over dullness. This artist has tremendous *brio* and a presence like that of Brünhilde. She makes something of jazz and almost redeems its rhythms from idiocy. She can, with a single gesture, bring a whole world before you—the world of the New York midinette or the Kentucky negro. You

may not care for the whole of this artist's matter—personally, I am weary of all those conjectures as to what American babies will do when their boys are far away—but there is no doubt as to the artist's power to get the stuff over. In other words, you cannot overlook Miss Bayes. You may not care particularly for the Monument, but you cannot deny its existence. Miss Bayes is monumental, and can be relied upon to do nothing in a hurry. One of our firework pianists, asked what he thought of a rival's rendering of a Liszt Rhapsody, replied, " I can play it faster." Miss Bayes can sing more slowly than any other artist of the halls. It may be argued that, in the matter of Liszt, the executant's criticism was the only possible one. So, too, perhaps Miss Bayes may be justified. Her songs are jeremiads, having their rise in the tribulations of the sons of Ham.

Yet, if this artist aspires to be something more than a popular success she should get some better material. Her song about a dead nigger, with the guying, in the accompaniment, of a well-known funeral march, seemed to me to be distressing. I cannot understand the liking for *Samson*. Ditties like this would seem to show that there is something in what the scientists call " katabolism," " destructive metabolism," or " retrogressive metamorphism." In other words, the white man's brain is giving way ; the negroid strain is coming to the top, and Kentucky is become the capital of the once civilised world. Half-way through, Miss Bayes's repertoire became more than

tedious, not through any fault of the artist, but because there were no brains in her material. But the audience, self-intoxicated, would certainly not have agreed with me.

July 20.

The Alhambra

A LITTLE story to illustrate the music-hall's hold over the popular mind. One recent Sunday afternoon I was curiously inspecting the Albert Memorial, and close to me were two "blokes." Said one, pointing to a figure in relief and reading the name beneath: "'Ere's Palladio!" "Wot-oh!" replied his chum. "I egspec Coliseo's rahnd the other side."

The art of the music-hall will enchant and enthral for just so long as it is practised by enchanting and enthralling artists. Last week's bill at the Alhambra contained the Scotch character comedian, Mr. Will Fyffe, whose daft loony is a masterpiece of tragi-comedy. For a time the fellow rambles on, recounting the minor victories of witlessness over wit. And then the note changes. The boy is to draw from the savings bank his seventeen treasured pounds. Jim McGregor —who gave him shoes and stockings, who never called him daft and who brought blood to the faces of those who did—Jim McGregor is dead, and the money is for his bairns.

The exquisites of the 'nineties made great fuss over Flaubert's burying of M. Dambreuse—"of whom there shall be no more question on this earth." Seven

people, and seven alone, declared Mr. George Moore, were capable of appreciating this great passage from *L'Education Sentimentale*, and they met once a year in the Champs Élysées to read it aloud to each other under the lilac trees. But there must be nearly seven million people in London capable of appreciating Mr. Fyffe's burial of Jim McGregor. He does it with so much passion. This wander-wit shows something of that awe which even those who possess their souls most tightly must feel in the presence of annihilation. For the imbecile as for the reasoning there looms but the horror of the shade. And with the expression of this dread comes the loosening of all that has been pent-up in the crazy prison of his mind—natural grief, dumb gratitude, resentment even. He is not to be allowed to go to the funeral lest he should make the villagers laugh !

Mr. Fyffe has a sob here of which Garrick had been proud. I use the great name to give this piece of acting its scale. Let there be no mistake. I do not say that Mr. Fyffe is as great an actor as Garrick. But I do say that the older actor could not have bettered that mingling of pathos and *grotesquerie*. If one may use the word genius of a performance of our day, here is genius. The actor's matter would have enchanted Lamb, his aspect enticed old Zoffany. Mr. Fyffe's second study, that of a staunch inebriate, drew tears of a different order. "Whaur's your Harry Lauder noo ?" is a question which I shall not attempt to answer.

There is nothing else to compare with this performance. Mr. Jack Hylton's band is chiefly remarkable for the skill with which it anticipates its conductor's beat. One remembers the old amazement with which, years ago, the audience at the Halle Concerts first saw Richter lay down his bâton, and leave the orchestra to the 5-4 movement of the Pathetic symphony and their own devices. Mr. Hylton's beat on Friday afternoon was so persistently in arrear that one wondered he did not do the same thing. But some arrangements of a popular air in the manner of Liszt, German, Tschaikowsky, Rachmaninoff, Cyril Scott, and Wagner were ingenious. The band was also given a chance to show that it can *play* brass instruments, as well as mute, or rather mutilate, them for the purposes of jazz. Which is rather like saying that Picasso can draw when he wants to. Miss Jenny Golder had one song which proved that Marie Lloyd left no successor.

October 19.

"La Chauve-Souris"

LA CHAUVE-SOURIS is "pure theatre"—a phrase which is more familiar abroad than it is at home. The special virtue of our race is that we are non-temperamental ; and, indeed, the display of pure emotion is, to our notions, hardly "good form." You might say that as the English theatre-goer pulls on his dress-shirt he puts on Colonel Newcome. But these Russian fellows are different. With them theatrical emotion can afford to go naked, since we who look on are unashamed. If we blush at the lack of reticence, at least we do not blush for our own. There is hardly an actor in the troupe who has not the passion to play Othello or the gormandising humour for Falstaff. And, of course, they are real Russians, and not our musical comedy sort, whose steppes are Riceyman's.

The masterpieces of Chauve-Souris are pure theatre in the sense that when they are not in being on the stage they do not exist. They are not the acted form of something which may be conned in the study ; they are the sudden fusion of things seen and heard and felt.

These pictures are not illustrations, because they

depend from no text. Take, for example, *The King Orders the Drums to be Beaten.* You feel, as you watch the flowering of this miniature tragedy, not that the *décor* and dresses are subsidiary to a tale, but that they *are* the tale. The despotism of the tyrant is in the shape and substance of his papier-mâché crown ; in the wig of the knight who yields up wife and honour is the whole court of le Roi Soleil ; unyielding brocade bespeaks the Queen's rancour ; submission lies in the drooping gown of the knight's lady, and compassion is all the minion's pose.

Or take the tableau called *Les Zaporogues* after the picture by Répine. The Sultan of Turkey has sent to these Ukrainian Cossacks a letter demanding payment of a war levy. Only one of them can write, and the others crowd round him dictating what he shall answer, and suggesting the gibes with which their reply shall be decorated. I do not know a word of Russian, and must therefore be ignorant of the insults. But I know their tenor from watching the face of the youngest of the band, peering slyly from under the scribe's arm. Take the malice out of the lad's face, and the letter becomes a model of polite correspondence.

Barbarian ecstasy, gallantry under French Louis, naïve buffoonery, the porcelain sentimentality of Sèvres or Dresden—all come alike to these superb artists. *Love and Hierarchy* shows a lady at the barrack gate ogling and being ogled by drummer boy, sergeant, lieutenant, and colonel. Finally, a fat general appears,

bursting with glory at every button, and to him military discipline accords the fair. This is pure ribaldry after every soldier's heart. *The Shepherdess Interlude*, from Tschaikowsky's opera, *La Dame de Pique*, was supposed to be a re-creation of Watteau. That is if one understood M. Balieff aright. But just as the Tschaikowsky seemed to be pure Mozart, so the scene in its curious solidity was pure Staffordshire pottery. The painted trees were obviously glazed ware from one to two inches thick, and their place was the mantelpiece. On the other hand, *An Ancient Cameo*, to some old music by Weckerlin, was perfect Sèvres. Anything more delicious than the *coup-d'œil* here cannot possibly be imagined.

But the best piece in the collection was, to my way of thinking, the last one, *A Country Picnic in a Distant Province of Russia.* You must imagine moonlight on a sleeping river, and the hour when even revellers grow sentimental. The last of the champagne is being savoured, and presently the baskets will be packed, and packed, too, into their calèches will be these elegant ladies now disposed to a pretty lassitude. There is dancing, and, here and there, beneath the trees, a whispered conversation. A young man, seeking one who should share his melancholy, peers into the faces of the talkers, and finding not his bliss moves on. Now comes singing—sisters we guess. The others dispose themselves about the grass, or on the roots of trees. The words are Russian, but we murmur :

Ma Douleur, donne-moi la main ; viens par ici,
Loin d'eux. Vois se pencher les défuntes Années
Sur les balcons du ciel en robes surannées ;
Surgir du fond des eaux le Regret souriant ;
Le Soleil moribond s'endormir sous une arche,
Et, comme un long linceul, trainant à l'Orient,
Entends, ma chère, entends la douce Nuit qui marche.

But the mind has play here, and can wander where it listeth. Whether the corroboration which it seeks be a verse of Baudelaire, a page from Turgenieff's *On the Eve*, or a canvas by Renoir, the mood is the same—that *recueillement*, or folding in upon oneself, for which our language has no single word.

December 7.

Films

"Anna Christie"

From the Play by EUGENE O'NEILL

The Palace Theatre

PERHAPS the most interesting event of the week was the matinée of this film given on Friday to a number of distinguished people previously unacquainted with the screen. In the letter of invitation the management took up the position that this picture "is essentially a literary film. . . . It has endeavoured to express, through the medium of the cinematograph camera, precisely the same spirit as animated the play." This is extremely interesting and well worth discussing.

The reader will remember the main strength and minor weaknesses of O'Neill's original work. This film version skilfully avoids some of the latter attributes. In the play we never really believe in the father's reiterated "dat old davil—sea." The only devil with whom the old sailor has to do is obviously drink. Christopherson's obsession seems, at first sight, to be no more than a theatrical device for getting Anna sent to the farm inland, out of the sea's way, during that long period which is still to end in wreckage. But there are passages in another play—*The Hairy Ape*—

which show that this idea of the sea's devilry is part of O'Neill's mental make-up. In the film we are shown something of the process of degradation which, on the stage, is simply postulated. Again, that lamentable fourth act is almost entirely cut, so that the lover comes back to the girl for the only sufficient reason—that he wants her. All that comic business, which is merely indifferent Synge, has gone by the board, and the very thin pretence that Anna has been made over again by her new love is very lightly stressed. It is obvious to any student of human nature, if not to the picture-goer, that the sailor loves this woman, and intends to make her his, whatever she has been. Probably O'Neill knew this perfectly well ; but we must remember that he had the infantile mind of the popular American audience to deal with.

The play might so nearly have been a great one. The whole point of it—up to the moment when the sailor brandishes the chair over Anna's head—is that young woman's essential purity. She was as innocent as our English Tess. Just as Mr. Hardy's heroine must be supposed to have loathed Alec D'Urberville, so Anna hated " every mother's son of 'em." It was annoying in the play to find Anna declaring herself to her lover as morally deficient and in need of a good, honest love affair to make her a clean, decent woman again. Why O'Neill should have bungled here it is difficult to say. M. Anatole France once declared this young American writer to be in possession of a French mind, and perhaps the whole genesis of the

play is in that fact. For no Frenchman could ever quite resist the theme of the repentant courtesan, and since Dumas no French mind, even if it inhabit an American body, has been able to get away from that triumphant falsification: "Ainsi, quoi qu'elle fasse, la créature tombée ne se relèvera jamais. Dieu lui pardonnera peut-être, mais le monde sera inflexible," etc., etc. To have achieved tragedy Mr. O'Neill would have had to preserve his heroine's belief in herself. It is her lover who should have babbled the uncharitable creed, and, babbling, have brought down the chair in destruction. The father should then have shot the young man, and with his sentencing to death Justice, to adapt Mr. Hardy, would have been done, and the President of the Immortals (in Æschylean phrase) have ended his sport with Anna, her lover, and her father.

But all this would have been to re-write the play and the picture. What is more to the point, perhaps, is to testify to the strict fidelity of this version to the best in the play. There are as few sub-titles as may be, and the adapter has had what amounts to a stroke of genius in leaving the whole of Anna's speech of self-accusation to a single gesture and the spectator's imagination. A stroke of audacity, too. What producer ever before credited cinema-goers with the imagination of a hen? The photography is good and the acting excellent. Mr. George Marion doubles his fine impersonation of the father, and as Matt Burke Mr. William Russell is altogether more powerful than

was Mr. Frank Shannon. Let me suggest to Mr. Cochran, who is now in America, that he should scour that continent till he finds Mr. Russell, discover whether he has brains and a voice—neither of which is to be deduced from the most successful grimacings before a camera—and, in the happy event, bring him over in *The Hairy Ape*, one of Mr. O'Neill's two works of genius. Miss Blanche Sweet is said to be excellent, but I cannot see it. When her Anna is good, she is very, very good; when Miss Sweet makes her bad, she is just a commonplace little horror. Anna is, in fact, two people, all innocence and flaxen curls like Marguerite, and a fast little baggage with a broken hat and drop earrings. Psychology, it seems to me, should go deeper than having your ears pierced. The thing about Pauline Lord's performance was her suggestion of a well of innocence upon which life had imposed a merely accidental scum. She had pathos and humour; this film actress moved me no whit. Miss Eugenie Besserer's Martha played Anna right off the screen.

It has been said that the picture is a faithful one. But this is to say no more than that its creators have remodelled a living man in dead wax. They have produced a perfect likeness, but the thing does not come to life. And this very largely, perhaps entirely, because of the medium. The screen is not and, I beg leave to say, will never be, a medium for psychological exposition. The screen cannot help running to matter rather than to mind. The scenes which interested one

most in this film version were those in the stokehold of the liner, which vessel does not appear in the play, and those which portrayed the collision and subsequent capsizing. Put Nature, or the sea, or a big boat on the sea into a picture, and away goes the human interest.

This must be a constant danger to picture-makers. It is all a matter of medium. Consider *Typhoon.* Mr. Conrad is a master of the written story, and can keep that storm at sea in due subjection to the calm in the mind of the master mariner who rides it. But film this tale, and who would not lose even Captain Mac-Whirr in the hungry seas? Consider the last picture shown at this theatre, *Down to the Sea in Ships.* Who, once he had glimpsed that whale, cared a harpoon's end for the love affairs of a thousand New England quakeresses?

March 2.

"Moon of Israel"

From the Novel of Sir H. RIDER HAGGARD

London Pavilion

"IT'S an extraordinary thing," I heard a woman say at the conclusion of this picture, "nobody in the films ever tries to bring anybody back to life. They just let them die." This was good feminine criticism, needle-sharp and to the point. Certainly, if the masculine mind had stopped to take thought, it might have perceived that to smother with kisses a girl snatched from the stake and already more than half-asphyxiated, is homeopathy misapplied. Let precedents be admitted. Antony, dying on Egypt's breast, called neither upon Hennessy nor Martell, merely importuning death awhile, until of many thousand kisses, etc., etc. "Die here!" cried "Aigypt," the owner of that "golden mericle av a voice," as she held poor "Love-o' Women" up. And where Shakespeare and Mr. Kipling dispense with restoratives Sir Rider Haggard, one thinks, may eschew them also.

It is a mistake to go unsentimentally to expositions of pure sentiment. "Her passions," said Enobarbus, discussing the Queen of Egypt with the triumvir,

"are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love." By "pure love" I take it that the gruff soldier, or "old sweat" as we should call him to-day, meant pure, *i.e.*, undiluted, amativeness. In the mouth of Enobarbus the words mean one thing, in that of Adam Bede, another. At the films we must dispose our minds Victorianly. The passions of Moon of Israel are made of nothing but the finest part of pure sentimentality. When, therefore, she is found helping the Egyptian prince to his after-dinner coffee and liqueurs we have no need of a sub-title to reassure us that no other domicile could have safeguarded her from the vengeance of her tribe. Of "protection" in the deplorable French sense there is no hint. The Prince pats the lady's hand and she very prettily repulses him. Or, maybe, it is the other way round. But there is both patting and repulse.

It is a pity that Moon should be so obviously made up. The object of paint on the stage is simply to counteract the strong light, and any actress who shows any trace of make-up is made-up badly. The male players in the films have the art of concealing artifice. Why should not this knack be acquired by their "opposites"? Moon's eyes were obviously encircled by lamp-black, and her mouth had been extravagantly painted, with the result that a human face became a mask. Also the hands were over-manicured; and you are not going to persuade me that a brick-making slave could have preserved a prima donna's nails. Apart from this matter of make-up, Moon's acting

was by no means bad. True that when she laid her dying head on that princely breast a "close-up" showed her in the most vigorous health and liveliest spirits. "I am going to join my child," the maid said, with a roguish smile; and one thought of the shock which Sir Theodore Martin tells us was experienced by a very great lady when to her were presented "*Mademoiselle* Sarah Bernhardt et son fils." But on the whole this Moon looked with a watery eye, and when she wept every little flapper in the audience wept also. Incidentally, I thought that Moon's tragedy would have delighted Julia Mills, in whose diary I can read: "Went to the cinema. Are tears the dewdrops of the heart? (But why Moon? J. M.)"

The best acting seemed to me to be that of Mr. Henry Mar as Moses, who stalked through the piece like a figure out of a canvas by Caravaggio, and in moments of repose took on the sensibility of a later age. One "shot" of him, outlined against the sky, reproduced very perfectly the feeling of Millais's *Victory, O Lord.* This shot and the one other—a builder's scene composed after the Brangwyn manner—reached a far higher pictorial level than anything else in the film. They were the only two scenes in which *pictorial* emotion, as distinct from the dramatic, had been aimed at. And, of course, if the cinema is ever to become a serious art, it is this pictorial quality which will have to be developed.

The rest of the picture is merely a clever repro-

duction of grandiosities skilfully arranged. The assemblage of huge crowds, their manipulation, successful almost to the point of co-ordination in rhythm, are wonderful things, but they belong to the same order of genius as that which can transcribe the Mosaic Law on a threepenny bit. These are engineering and mechanical feats having little to do with æsthetics. The same applies to those huge agglomerations of plaster, which recollections of Wembley now overshadow. They startle economically, but leave untouched the sense of history and of beauty. These grandiosities remind me inversely of Weedon Grossmith's remark in the play : " I shouldn't like to tell you how much these cigars cost." " Of course you wouldn't ! " replied the man from Blankley's, taking one and walking away. Now these film-magnificoes object not at all to our overhearing how much their productions cost, and, indeed, have been known to advertise a " million-dollar film." But money is not everything even in the cinema world, and the shadow of the god Anubis, cast on a wall, is more effective than many battlements. *Suppressio falsi, suggestio veri* is a good æsthetic maxim, and in the re-creation of Nineveh and Tyre an ounce of imagination may go further than a thousand tons of plaster.

Nevertheless Messrs. Stoll are to be congratulated upon a picture handsome enough along established lines, and giving promise of that pictorial development in which other countries, excluding America, are so greatly ahead of us. The battle scenes, which might

have been written by the author of *Ben Hur* and "directed" by Lady Butler, are particularly stirring. The sub-titles, specially devised by Sir Rider Haggard, are apposite and good. A nice sense of climax is shown in the Israelite lament: "You steal our daughters, scourge our sons, and your tax-gatherers rob us of our harvests." That, of course, was where the shoe really pinched. And it is not often that we make the descent into bathos, although the centuries kiss and commingle in "I am weary of your clamour; the inquiry is adjourned."

The music, arranged by Mr. Ozgelist, was admirable, particularly the use of motives from the Pathetic Symphony. But was it quite wise to demand of Rachmaninoff's hackneyed Prelude that it should suggest wedding solemnities "sublime as the nuptials of Isis and Osiris"? The atmosphere of that piece is direr still, recalling, as it does, the jaded schoolroom and the pounding pig-tailed miss. Whosesoever the fault, the fact remains that the men in this film, and the men only, threw the mind back into past time. The women might easily have come out of revue, and early on there was a kind of armoured stewardess who recalled Miss Maisie Gay at her most truculent. But on the whole, and as English films go, this is a very good film indeed.

November 9.

"Zeebrugge"

MARBLE ARCH PAVILION

"Reveille"

STOLL PICTURE THEATRE

THE first of these two films is pure animated war correspondence. *Zeebrugge* is not dramatic, except at one or two moments, as when members of the German Cycling Corps, unaware that the mole has been cut, pedal blindly to destruction. There is another moment of half-humorous, half-pathetic emotion when the boats' spare crews refuse to obey the bo'sun's whistle piping them out of action. But the rest of the film is the soberest record of a very daring and gallant deed. One suggests that this is as it should be. Counterfeit death agonies of those we have loved and lost can never be quite convincing, or, if they are, they ought not to be. We are grateful, therefore, that the actual hand-to-hand battle on the mole is not given. Is, perhaps, too much made of the return of the wounded? On the whole, and in a manner which in no way belongs to the theatre, this

picture is of enthralling interest. Like that other instructional film which visualised General Allenby's exploits in Palestine, *Zeebrugge* will bring knowledge of a notable event in British naval history to many whose reading may not include studies of the Great War. Any of our late enemies present must have found food for ironic comment in the fact that the greater part of the accompanying music was defiantly German. Mendelssohn, Weber, and Wagner were freely laid under contribution.

Laceration of the most anguishing sort is the note sounded by *Reveille*—laceration and a message. It is all nonsense to say that the film cannot be drama because the Greeks of twenty-five centuries ago would have despised it. Personally, I feel sure that if those old boys had known of animated photography there would have arisen a Griffocles to tell the young idea about Leonidas at Thermopylæ, and rehearse the story of Epaminondas and his javelin. And it is unthinkable that that old Greek film would have been lacking in pity, terror, and all the rest of it. Now, *Reveille* conforms very exactly to all that we are always being told a great play ought to be. I cannot imagine anybody remaining unmoved before this most simple and most poignant story.

The picture takes us into the heart of poorer London in those now unbelievable days towards the end of the war, when months of agony were compensated by hours of insane delight. The ecstasy of short leave is most exquisitely done, and these

simple pictures of humble joy bring tears to every eye. Nearly all the bright youth of the first part of the picture is killed, and the girl who was to have been married on her lover's next return is left to bear her grief and responsibility. The second part shows disillusion eating into the hearts of those who have exchanged the misery of the trench for the wretchedness of the doss-house. The " message " of the film is anti-Red, and shows the re-sowing, during the Two Minutes' Silence, of the seed of loving kindness.

Let me clear my mind of cant, and declare that *Reveille* moved me a great deal more than all the Greek plays I have ever seen put together. What's Hecuba to me ? Whereas this girl-mother and her sweetheart, that thrice-bereaved widow of the greying hair, those tender-hearted, foolish old maids even, are part, not only of my consciousness which doesn't matter but part of the consciousness of every living English man and woman. Let me not be understood to say that *Reveille* is a greater work of art than *The Trojan Women.* It isn't, but it is about two thousand four hundred years nearer to the general heart. It is most beautifully acted by Miss Henrietta Watson, Miss Sydney Fairbrother, and, when she consents to repose, Miss Betty Balfour. Mr. Frank Stanmore as " Whelks," the proprietor of a fish stall, is entirely admirable, and Mr. Ralph Forbes plays the soldier-lover with extraordinary delicacy. Mr. Stewart Rome's broken hero is with me yet. If a picture, producing

such an effect upon a hardened theatre-goer, does not come within the category of the drama, then the sooner that category is enlarged to include it the better.

November 16.

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